

*The*  
**CULT OF OTHIN**

*An Essay in the Ancient  
Religion of the North*

H. M. Chadwick



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## Introduction

As there undoubtedly seems to be a resurging interest worldwide in the Nordic mysteries and religions, it is with pleasure that we at Looking Glass Press now publish this facsimile edition of a very important study, H. M. Chadwick's *"The Cult of Othin"*.

Although rather tiny in its number of pages, the scope and focus certainly are not. A scholar in the classical sense, Mr. Chadwick roams through mythological, historical and etymological aspects of early Odinism. One wishes that contemporary writers would show as much factual knowledge as did the researchers of old...

The early Wotan-worship of the Germanic tribes developed into more systematized cults spread over Northern Europe, with customs, teachings, philosophies, ritual, etc. Traces of these cults can still be felt and seen today by those sensitive enough. Chadwick gives examples of the developments by analyzing the old Sagas and the general culture of the Scandinavians in an intelligent and inspiring manner, not unlike the Swedish writer on runology, Sigurd Agrell.

Where will it end? No matter whether we will see a revitalized actual religion or just a continued curious interest in the customs of our ancestors, books like *"The Cult of Othin"* will help to illuminate all kinds of studies - private, academic or Order-related.

With respect to Mr. Chadwick, we hope that you will enjoy this little book.

Carl Abrahamsson, Stockholm 1994.

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# THE CULT OF OTHIN

## AN ESSAY IN THE ANCIENT RELIGION OF THE NORTH

BY

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## PREFACE.

THE following essay is an attempt to answer certain questions in regard to the character of one of the ancient Germanic cults. References to mythology have been as far as possible avoided except in Note III. In this case a reference to the Yggdrasill myth seemed to be necessitated by Bugge's *Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, for the theory propounded by Bugge affects the whole character of the Northern cult. The myth is clearly connected with the rite of tree-hanging which formed an important though possibly not an original feature in the cult.

Some apology is perhaps needed for the extensive use which I have made of the collection of sagas published in Rafn's *Fornaldar Sögur*. While admitting the lateness of the sagas themselves, I believe that much of the material which they contain is considerably older. At all events the more important of the stories here quoted occur also in Saxo or other early authorities.

In conclusion I have to express my obligations to several friends for valuable information and for assistance kindly given to me in various ways.

H. M. CHADWICK.

CAMBRIDGE,

April, 1899.



## ABBREVIATIONS.

O. E. = Old English.

O. H. G. = Old High German.

O. N. = Old Norse.

O. Sax. = Old Saxon.

s. = *saga*.

F. A. S. = Fornaldar Sögur.

Vgl. R. = Völuspá, Codex Regius.

P. B. B. = Paul-Braunes Beiträge.

Z. f. d. A. = Zeitschrift für deutsches Alterthum.



## INTRODUCTION.

Few of the ancient Germanic cults exercised a more important influence on the character and fortunes of the race than that of Woden. Yet in spite of this fact, not only the origin but even the character of the cult is shrouded in much obscurity. This is due partly to the scantiness of the evidence in England and on the Continent, partly to the fact that in the North, where the materials are much more plentiful, it is by no means unlikely that cults of essentially different character became confused even before the end of heathen times. In one respect a fairly satisfactory conclusion seems to have been reached in recent years; Petersen's work "*Om Nordboernes gudekyrkelse og gudetro i hedenold*" (1876) has rendered it probable that the cult of Woden (Othin) was not native in the North. Another conclusion which has found general acceptance, namely, that the cult was never practised by the tribes of Upper Germany, seems to me less certain, as it is based entirely on negative evidence.

The myths connected with Othin have been frequently discussed, but sufficient attention has hardly been paid to the cult itself and the rites with which it was associated. In the following pages an attempt will be made to examine this subject with a view to obtaining answers to the following questions: 1. What were the characteristics

of the cult in the North? 2. Is this cult approximately identical with that of the ancient (continental) Germans, or has it undergone substantial modifications in the North? 3. When was the cult introduced into the North?

In regard to the origin of the cult, it seems to me that we are not yet in a position to arrive at any satisfactory conclusion. I am not convinced that "Woden is the deified Wode" and that the cult is an outgrowth of the belief known as "das wütende Heer." On the contrary I suspect that its origin is rather to be sought outside the Germanic area, probably either among the Gauls or among the races inhabiting the basin of the Danube. Another difficult question closely bound up with the preceding is the relationship between Woden-Othin and the Germanic "Mars" (O.H.G. *Zio*, O.E. *Tī*, *Tīw*-, O.N. *Týr*), a deity who, to judge from his name (originally \**Tīwaz*, "god"), must once have occupied a peculiar position in the Germanic theology. It is possible that the Northern Othin, perhaps even the Wōdenaz-Mercurius of the first century, may have had some of the attributes of this (probably older) deity transferred to him. Of the god *Tīwaz* however but little is known, though he has been the subject of much unprofitable speculation. For the present I prefer to avoid discussing this question.

## CHAPTER I.

### THE CULT OF OTHIN IN THE NORTH.

ALLUSIONS to sacrifices offered to Othin on the battle-field are frequent. These sacrifices however must be discussed together with other rites connected with the cult of Othin in time of war. The worship of Othin by sacrifice. Sacrifices under other circumstances are not unfrequently mentioned, but the god to whom the sacrifice was offered is not usually specified. In cases where it is distinctly stated that the sacrifice was offered to Othin, the victims are, so far as I am aware, always human. This however may be an accident as the number of examples is small. The most striking case is the sacrifice of king Vikar, which is recorded in *Gautreks s. konungs* c. 7 (F. A. S. III. p. 31 ff.) and *Saxo* VI. p. 276 f. According to the account given in *Gautreks Saga*, Vikar's fleet was delayed by contrary winds. Having had recourse to divination, they find that Othin requires a man out of their company. The victim is to be chosen by lot and hanged. Selection by lot is therefore made throughout the host, and the lot falls on the king. After this the *Saga* goes on to relate *Starkaðr's* vision in the forest (cf. p. 68 f.). At the conclusion of the discussion *Hrosshársgrani* (Othin) asks *Starkaðr* to reward him for the services which he has rendered him, and to this *Starkaðr* consents. *Hrosshársgrani* then says that he

requires Vikar to be sent to him and instructs Starkaðr how this is to be done. He gives Starkaðr a javelin and tells him that this will appear to be a reed-cane. After this they return to the host, and the following morning the king's councillors meet to consider what is to be done. They all agree that the sacrifice should be carried out in form only, to which end Starkaðr proposes a plan. In the neighbourhood was a fir tree and close by it a tall stump, over which a long thin branch hung down from the upper part of the tree. The servants were at the time preparing a meal, and had killed and cut up a calf. Starkaðr took some of the calf's entrails and, climbing on to the stump, pulled down the branch and tied the strings on to it. Then he said to the king, "Here is a gallows ready for you, O king, and I do not think it looks very dangerous." The king climbed on to the stump, and Starkaðr laid the noose round his neck and leaped down. Then he thrust against the king with his cane saying, "Now I give thee to Othin," and released the branch. The cane turned into a javelin and transfixed the king, the stump fell from beneath his feet, and the strings turned into strong withies; the branch flew back and swept the king into the tree-top, and there he died.

According to Ynglinga s. 29, Aun, king of Sweden, sacrificed to Othin for length of life, and obtained the answer that he should live so long as he sacrificed one of his sons every tenth year. In this way nine of his ten sons were sacrificed. Again, according to Ynglinga s. 47, there was a famine in the reign of Ólafr Trételgi, which the people attributed to the fact that Ólafr was not zealous in sacrificing. They therefore "burnt him in his house and gave him to Othin, sacrificing him that they themselves might have plenty<sup>1</sup>." With this passage may

<sup>1</sup> brendu hann inni ok gáfu hann Óðni ok blétu honum til árs sér.



be compared *Hervarar s. ok Heiðreks konungs*, c. 11, 12 (F. A. S. i. 451 ff.), which describes how a famine arose in *Reiðgotaland* during the reign of king *Haraldr*. It was found by divination that the famine could only be stopped by the sacrifice of the noblest youth in the land. It was unanimously agreed that *Angantýr*, son of *Heiðrekr*, was the person required. *Heiðrekr* however took counsel to avoid this, and determined to offer the king with his son *Halfdan* and all their host as a sacrifice to *Othin* in place of his own son. He therefore attacked and slew them, and "had the temples reddened with the blood of *Haraldr* and *Halfdan*, and committed to *Othin* all the host that had fallen, as an offering for plenty in place of his son."

Besides these occasional sacrifices it is probable that sacrifices to *Othin* were offered also at certain fixed festivals. The heathen Scandinavians had three great annual sacrifices, which are thus described in *Ynglinga s.* 8: (1) *í móti vetri til árs*, "at the approach of winter; (this sacrifice was) for plenty": (2) *at miðium vetri til gróðrar*, "at midwinter for increase (of the crops)": (3) *at sumri, þat var sigrblót*, "at the beginning of summer; this was a sacrifice for victory." The first of these sacrifices was certainly connected with the worship of *Frö*; the second probably with that of *Thor*<sup>1</sup>. It is probable also that the third of these sacrifices (the sacrifice for victory) was associated with *Othin*. This is shown by the constant references to *Othin* as the giver of victory; by his name *Sigtýr*, "god of victory"; by sacrifices and vows made to *Othin* for victory in time of war, examples of which will be given in the following pages; lastly by the custom observed in the drinking of toasts, which is thus described in *Hákonar s. góða*, c. 16:

<sup>1</sup> Cf. *Adam of Bremen* iv. 26. *Thor...uentos ymbresque serena et fruges gubernat.*

"It was customary first to drink Othin's toast for victory and for the glory of their king, and after that the toasts of Nigrðr and Frö for plenty and peace." Besides these annual festivals there were sacrifices on a great scale every nine years at Upsala and Leire<sup>1</sup>, at which sacrifices of men together with various animals were offered. According to Schol. 137 to Adam of Bremen the sacrifice at Upsala took place about the spring equinox; it would coincide therefore with the annual sacrifice for victory. Consequently it is not unlikely that this sacrifice also was connected with the worship of Othin. At Leire indeed the corresponding sacrifice took place in January. It is possible however that the arrangement of the annual sacrifices in Denmark was not the same as in Norway and Sweden.

According to Adam of Bremen iv. 27 sacrifice was offered by the Swedes to Othin on the approach of war<sup>2</sup>. It seems to have been at one time a common practice to sacrifice notable prisoners taken in war. In the account of the battle in Egils s. ok Ásmundar c. 8 (F. A. S. III. p. 379) it is stated that "all Ásmundr's men had fallen and he was himself taken prisoner; it was then evening; they had decided to slay him on the morrow at Aran's tomb, and give him to Othin that they might themselves have victory" (*gefa hann Óðni til sigrs sér*). The same phrase is used in Orkn. saga c. 8, where it is related that Ragnar's sons captured Ella and put him to death by cutting the "blood-eagle" upon his back (cf. Ragnars s. Loðbrókar, c. 18; Saxo ix. p. 463). It is probable also that the hanging of captured enemies was regarded as a sacrifice to Othin. This custom is frequently mentioned, especially

The cult of  
Othin in time  
of war.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Adam of Bremen, iv. 27; Thietmar, Chron. i. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Si pestis et famis imminet Thor ydolo libatur, si bellum Wodani.

in stories which deal with the reign of Iqrmunrekr (cf. p. 17).

The dedication of an enemy's army to Othin before the commencement of a battle must also have been regarded as a sacrificial act. According to *Eyrbyggja s.* 44 it was the custom in ancient times to shoot a javelin over the enemy's army, in order to turn the luck in one's own favour<sup>1</sup>. That this custom was connected with the cult of Othin is shown by the following examples: In *Hervarar s. ok Heiðreks c.* 18 (F. A. S. i. 501), before the battle between the *Reiðgotar* and the Huns, Gizr rode up to the Huns' army and said: "Your king is panic-stricken, your leader is doomed,...Othin is wroth with you;...may Othin let the dart fly according to my words." So also in *Styrbiarnar þáttur c.* 2: Before his battle with *Styrbiörn Eirekr* went into Othin's temple and devoted himself to die after ten years, if he might obtain the victory; shortly afterwards he saw a tall man with a long hood, who gave him a cane and told him to shoot it over *Styrbiörn's* army with these words: "Ye all belong to Othin<sup>2</sup>." This example is remarkable because the battle is a historical event and seems to have taken place about 960—970 (cf. *Saxo x.* p. 479). According to the *Saga af Haraldi Gráfeld c.* 11, *Eirekr* died ten years after *Styrbiörn's* fall. With the phrase "Ye all belong to Othin" may be compared *Saxo vii.* p. 361, where it is stated that *Haraldus* (i.e. *Haraldr Hilditönn*, king of Denmark) had acquired the favour of Othin to such an extent that the latter granted him immunity from wounds in war. In return for this *Haraldus* "is said to have promised to Othin the souls which he ejected from their bodies by the sword."

<sup>1</sup> Þá skaut Steinþórr spjóti at fornum sið til heilla sér yfir flokk Snorra.

<sup>2</sup> Óðinn á yðr alla.

According to Saxo VIII. p. 390 Haraldus repeated this vow in his last fight, in order that he might obtain the victory against Ringo (i.e. Sigurðr Hringr). In the *Sögubrot af Fornkonungum*, c. 8 (F. A. S. I. 380) the words of this vow are given as follows: "I give to Othin (*gef ek Óðni*) all the host which falls in this battle." It is noticeable that this is the sacrificial formula (cf. p. 4). Again, according to Saxo IX. p. 446, Syuardus (i.e. Sigurðr ormr í auga, son of Ragnar Loðbrók) was so severely wounded that the physicians despaired of his life, when a certain man of immense size approached his couch and promised to restore him to health forthwith "if he would devote to him the souls of those whom he should destroy in war<sup>1</sup>." He declared that his name was Rostarus.

But further, the slaying of an enemy in battle under ordinary circumstances seems to have been regarded as a sacrifice to Othin. This is shown by a verse in *Skaldskaparmál*, c. 1, attributed to Thiðólfr: "There lay the dead on the sand, allotted to Frigg's one-eyed husband; we rejoiced at such a deed<sup>2</sup>." With this may be compared *Islendinga s. I.* p. 307, where Helgi after killing Thorgrímr in battle sings: "I have given the brave son of Thormóðr to Othin; we have offered him as a sacrifice to the ruler of the gallows, and his corpse to the raven<sup>3</sup>." In this passage the phrase "give to Othin" is practically equivalent to "slay in battle." In like manner the phrases "go to Othin" and "receive Othin's hospitality" are used as equivalent to "be slain in battle," e.g. in *Ragnars s. Loðbrókar*, c. 9 (F. A. S. I. 265), when Aslaug hears of

<sup>1</sup> Si sibi illorum quos armis oppressurus foret animas dedicasset.

<sup>2</sup> valr lá þar á sandi vitinn inum eineygia  
Friggiar faðmbyggvi. fognuðum dáf slíkri.

<sup>3</sup> Ásmóðar gaf ek Óðni arfa þróttar diarfan,  
guldum galgavaldi Gautstafn en ná hrafni.

her son's death, she says:—"Rognvaldr began to stain his shield with the blood of men; he, the youngest of my sons, in his terrible valour has come to Othin<sup>1</sup>."

In *Hrómundar s. Greipssonar*, c. 2 (F. A. S. II. 366), Kari, when mortally wounded, says to the king:—"Farewell, I am going to be Othin's guest<sup>2</sup>." So also in the account of the fight between Hialmar and Oddr and the twelve "berserkir" in *Hervarar s. ok Heiðreks*, c. 5 (F. A. S. I. 422 f.), Hialmar says to Oddr: "It seems to me very likely that we shall all be Othin's guests in Valhøll to-night<sup>3</sup>." Oddr answers: "It is not I who shall be Othin's guest to-night, but they will all be dead before night comes, and we shall be alive." In the verse the dialogue runs thus: H. "We two brave warriors shall be Othin's guests this evening, but those twelve will live." O. "They will be Othin's guests this evening, the twelve berserkir, but we two shall live<sup>4</sup>." The synonymous phrase *í Valhøll gista* ('lodge in Valhøll') occurs in *Hrólfs s. Kraka* 51 (F. A. S. I. 106).

It has already been pointed out that the phrase "give to Othin" is applied both to sacrifice and to the slaying of an enemy. By itself the meaning of this phrase might be ambiguous; the expression "become Othin's guest" however can have only one meaning, namely that the person of whom it was used must have been regarded as still existing after death in some close relationship to Othin. That persons killed in battle were regarded as passing into Othin's presence is shown by the names

<sup>1</sup> Rognvaldr tók at riðða rønd í gumna blóði;  
hann kom yngstr til Óðins ógndiarfr sona mínna.

<sup>2</sup> ek man hiá Óðni gista.

<sup>3</sup> at vér munum allir Óðinn gista í Valhøll í kvöld.

<sup>4</sup> H. við munum í aptan Óðinn gista  
tveir fullhugar, en þeir tolf lífa.

O. ...þeir munu í aptan Óðinn gista  
toft berserkir, en við tveir lífa.

*Val-føðr*, "father of the slain," applied to Othin himself, and *Val-höll*, "hall of the slain," applied to Othin's dwelling; so also by such passages as the following:—"The fifth dwelling is called 'Glaðsheimr,' where Valhöll bright with gold stands wide outspread; there Hroptr (i.e. Othin) chooses every day men who die by arms." *Grímnismál*, v. 8<sup>1</sup>. So also *Krakumál*, v. 29 (F. A. S. I. 310):—"The Disir (i.e. Valkyries) summon me home; Othin has sent them to me from Herjan's hall; I will gladly drink ale in the highseat among the Aesir...<sup>2</sup>" Ragnar Loðbrók, however, whose last words are here given, did not die actually in battle but was put to death afterwards by means of poisonous snakes. In *Helgakviða Hundingsbana*, II. 37 f., the slain Helgi is represented as coming to Valhöll and there meeting his old enemy Hundingr. Othin offers Helgi a share in all his power. The entrance of a slain man into Valhöll forms the subject also of the poems *Eireksmál* and *Hákonarmál*. In the latter poem the Val-kyriur, "choosers of the slain," figure prominently. But it is at least questionable if in actual religious belief they occupied the same position which is ascribed to them in the poetry. They are elsewhere (*Völsunga s.* 2 etc.) called Othin's *óskmeyjar* "adopted maidens" (or "daughters"). With this may be compared the expression *óskusynir*, "adopted sons," in *Gylf.* 20: "all those who fall in battle are called Othin's

<sup>1</sup> Glaðsheimr heitir inn fimti,  
þars in gullbiarta  
Valhöll víð of þrumir;  
en þar Hroptr  
kýss hverian dag  
vápn dauða vera.

<sup>2</sup> ...heim biðða mér Disir,  
sem frá Herians höllu  
hefir Óðinn mér sendar;  
glæðr skal ek þi með Ásum  
í þundvegi drekka.....

*óskasynir*." The more usual term for the latter is however *einherjar*, which signifies perhaps merely "champions." Their life is described in *Vafþrúðnismál* 41 (cf. *Grímn.* 23).

The belief in immortality in connection with the cult of Othin is stated as follows in *Ynglinga* s. 10:—"The Swedes often thought that Othin appeared to them when a great battle was impending; to some he gave victory, while others he summoned to him; either alternative seemed good<sup>1</sup>." This attitude of mind was displayed by Sigmundr, who, when he lay mortally wounded, spoke as follows (*Völsunga* s. 12):—"It is Othin's will that we shall no longer draw the sword, now that it is broken; I have fought so long as it pleased him;.....I will now go to seek our kinsfolk who are already departed." This is to be compared with *Ynglinga* s. 10, where Othin on his deathbed is represented as saying that he was about to go to *Goðheimr* and to greet his friends there. It is likely however that these passages are due to the influence of Christian ideas. The heathen spirit is more clearly to be discerned in the dying words of Ragnar Loðbrók (*Krakumál* 29, cf. p. 10): "I will gladly drink ale on the highseat among the Aesir; the hours of my life are ended; I will die laughing<sup>2</sup>." But the view that "either alternative (victory or death) was good" did not always prevail. Thus in *Halfs* s. 13 (*F. A. S.* II. 45), when King Halfr has fallen with a great part of his army, *Innsteinn*, one of his followers, says:—"We owe Othin an evil reward for robbing such a king of victory<sup>3</sup>." So also in *Saga*

<sup>1</sup> gaf hann þá sumum sigr, en sumum bauð hann til sín; þótti hvárr-tveggi kostur góðr.

<sup>2</sup> ...lífs eru liðnar stundir  
læiandi skal ek deya.

<sup>3</sup> egum Óðni illt at gjalda  
er hann slíkan konung sigri rænti.

Ketils hængs 5 (F. A. S. II. 132 ff., 139), Framarr, to whom Othin had granted victory and immunity from the effects of iron, says, when mortally wounded:—"Balder's father has now broken faith; it is unsafe to trust him<sup>1</sup>." Othin is represented as turning against his heroes at the last. Another example occurs in Saxo's account of the 'bellum Braucum' (VIII. p. 390), where Haraldus finds that Othin has betrayed the secret of the 'wedge' (see p. 21) to his rival Ringo. He then discovers that Othin has taken the place of his councillor Bruno and is acting as charioteer to him. In spite of his prayers, Bruno throws Haraldus down to the ground and kills him. So also in Saxo v. p. 238) the army of the Huns in its distress is deserted by a certain 'Uggerus uates' of uncertain though more than human age. This man, who is clearly Othin (Icel. *Yggv*), goes over to Frotho and betrays to him the plans of the Huns. Othin is called "faithless" also in *Hrólfs s. Kraka* c. 51 (F. A. S. I. 107), where Boðvar Biarki looking on the ranks of the enemy says that he can not discern Othin, yet strongly suspects that he is flitting about amongst them, "the foul and faithless son of Herian." Othin's unfairness is made a taunt against him in *Lokasenna* 22; Loki says:—"Be silent, Othin, thou hast never been able to order the course of war (fairly); often hast thou given victory to cowards, who did not deserve it" (cf. also *Hárbarðsljóð* 25). An explanation of Othin's inconstancy and unfairness is suggested in *Eireksmál* 24 ff.; when Othin praises Eirekr, who is now approaching the gate of Valhøll, Sigmundr asks him: "Why hast thou deprived

<sup>1</sup> brást nú Baldurs faðir; brigt er at trúa honum.

<sup>2</sup> þegi þú, Óðinn, þú kunnir aldrigi  
deila víg með verum;  
opt þu gaft þeim er þú gefa skyldira,  
enum slævurum, sigr.



him of victory if thou thoughtest him to be brave?" Othin answers: "Because it cannot clearly be known when the gray wolf shall come against the abodes of the gods<sup>1</sup>." The meaning obviously is that Othin wishes to have great champions amongst his 'Einheriar' to help him in his struggle against the wolf. So also in *Grímnismál* 23 the Einheriar are represented as going forth to battle against the hostile powers.

It is still doubtful how great an antiquity can be claimed for the Scandinavian doctrine concerning the end of the world. Until this is settled it is clearly impossible to decide whether the explanation of Othin's inconstancy given in *Eireksmál* is in accordance with ancient belief or is a conception of the tenth century poets. It has been shown in the preceding pages that persons killed in battle were regarded as passing to Valhøll. Now since Othin's heroes usually fell in battle, and Othin had the control over victory and death (cf. p. 11), it follows that, as soon as death in battle came to be regarded as undesirable, a belief in Othin's inconstancy must necessarily arise, and some explanation of this inconstancy be furnished<sup>2</sup>.

There seem to be traces of one other sacrificial or semi-sacrificial rite connected with the cult of Othin. In the *Ynglinga saga* Othin is represented as a king who had once ruled in Sweden. The account of his life ends as follows (c. 10):—"Othin died of sickness in Sweden; and when he was at death's door he had himself marked with

<sup>1</sup> S. *hví namtu hann sigri þá ef þér þótti hann sniallr vesa?*

O. *því at óvist es at vita  
nær úlfr inn hǫsvi  
gengr á siqt goða.*

<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to reconcile this explanation with the existence of the belief in metempsychosis. That a belief of this kind prevailed, to some extent at least, is shown especially by the prose passage at the end of *Helgakviða Hundingsbana* II.

the point of a javelin and appropriated to himself all men who met their death by arms; he said that he was about to go to Goðheimr and greet his friends there<sup>1</sup>." That this is to be regarded as the establishment of a custom is made probable by the description of the death of Njǫrðr in the following chapter:—"Njǫrðr died of sickness; he also had himself marked for Othin before he died<sup>2</sup>." There are no certain references to such a custom elsewhere, so far as I am aware. But in Hyndluljóð 28, after the enumeration of Óttarr's ancestors, the following sentence occurs (referring perhaps only to the persons mentioned in the same verse): "They were men marked with a sign for the gods<sup>3</sup>." It is remarkable that the same expression is used by Starkaðr in Gautreks s. 7 (F.S.A. III. 35), when he is describing the sacrifice of Vikar: "I had to mark (or possibly "decided to mark") Vikar with a sign for the gods<sup>4</sup>." If this refers to his stabbing Vikar with Othin's javelin (cf. p. 4), the passage in Hyndluljóð may very well be a reminiscence of some such rite as that described in Ynglinga s. 10, 11. At the same time, however, the absence of evidence from any other source must be taken as showing that the *riðr* was not well known, and probably not practised in the last days of heathendom. The rite was clearly regarded by the writer of Ynglinga saga as a substitution for death in battle.

In the account of the sacrifice of Vikar in Gautreks s. 7 (see p. 3 f.) the complicated nature of the ceremonial, above all the combination of stabbing and hanging at the same time, would naturally lead

The ritual  
of sacrifice.

<sup>1</sup> Óðinn varð sóttðauðr í Svíþjóð; ok er hann var at kominn bana, lét hann marka sik geirsoddi ok eignaði sér alla vápnðauða menn etc.

<sup>2</sup> Njǫrðr varð sóttðauðr, lét hann ok marka sik Óðni áðr hann dó.

<sup>3</sup> þeir váru gumnar goðum signaðir.

<sup>4</sup> skylda (skilda MSS.) ek Vikar...goðum um signa.

one to the conclusion that the story gives a more or less faithful picture of the ritual actually employed in sacrifice to Othin. It is true that the present text of the saga is late, but since the story was known to Saxo (VI. p. 276 f.) in practically the same form, it must have been current at any rate before the end of the 12th century, that is to say not more than 100—150 years after human sacrifices had ceased to be practised. Bugge however (*Studier over de nordiske Gude- og Heltesagns Oprindelse*, p. 315) holds that the story has been affected by a myth to which reference is made in *Hávamál* 138 :—"I know that I hung full nine nights on the gallows (or 'windy tree') wounded by the javelin and given to Othin, myself to myself" etc<sup>1</sup>. It seems to me totally unnecessary to suppose that the account of the Vikar-sacrifice has been built up out of this myth. But, as the question has been raised, it will be well to examine other passages in which sacrifices are described, with a view to ascertaining, if possible, the means employed for putting the victim to death.

Apart from the two examples mentioned above there is no example of the employment of hanging and stabbing combined<sup>2</sup>. Indeed, apart from these cases, there is no example of the stabbing of a victim<sup>3</sup>. Yet the javelin is frequently associated with Othin. His own peculiar weapon is the javelin *Gungnir* (*Skaldsk.* 3). It is with a javelin

<sup>1</sup> veit ek at ek hekk  
vindga meiði á  
nætr allar níu,  
geiri undaðr  
ok gefinn Óðni,  
siálfr siálfum mér etc.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. however the story of Ibn Fazlan, p. 43.

<sup>3</sup> The javelin is used for killing Eirekr son of Ragnar Loðbrók in *Ragnars s. L.* 9 (F.A.S. i. 262 f.). It is not distinctly stated that this was a sacrifice, but it can hardly have been otherwise.

that he has himself marked before his death according to Yngl. 10 (cf. p. 13 f.). When Dagr sacrifices to Othin (Helgakv. Hundingsbana II. 27, prose), Othin lends him his javelin, with which he stabs Helgi. So also in Volunga s. 11 (F.A.S. I. 145) Sigmundr in his last battle met a man who had one eye and held a javelin in his hand. When Sigmundr attacked him with his sword he received the blow on his javelin; the sword then snapped in two pieces. So again in Egils s. ok Ásmundar c. 17 (F.A.S. III. 407) Othin is said to have stabbed Ásmundr with his javelin. The practice of dedicating the enemy to Othin by throwing a javelin over their army (cf. p. 7) may also be compared.

References to sacrificial hanging are fairly frequent. At the great festival which, according to Adam of Bremen, (IV. 27) took place every nine years at Upsala (cf. p. 6), the bodies of the victims, human and animal alike, were hung in the grove close to the temple<sup>1</sup>. It has been shown (p. 6) that it was customary to put to death prisoners captured in war as a sacrifice to Othin. Such persons appear to have been frequently hanged. Thus according to Ynglinga s. 26 Iqrunr and Eiríkr captured Guðlaugr, king of the Háleygir, and hanged him. In Yngl. 28 Gýlaugr son of Guðlaugr captures and hangs Iqrunr. In the verse quoted from Thjóðólfr in this passage the gallows is called "Sleipnir"—the name of Othin's horse<sup>2</sup>. So also with persons arrested in acts of hostility or trespass generally. Thus in Saxo I. p. 28 Gro warns Bessus that her father Sigtrug will overcome and hang him. Several cases of hanging occur in the cycle of

<sup>1</sup> Corpora autem suspenduntur in lucum qui proximus est templo.

<sup>2</sup> The hanging of prisoners captured in war seems to have been practised occasionally even 'down to historical times, e.g. Olafs s. Tryggvasonar (Heimskringla) c. 14, where Hákon hangs Gullharaldr.

stories relating to Iqrmunrekr<sup>1</sup>. Thus according to Saxo VIII. p. 411 Iarmericus captured and hanged forty Slavs, hanging wolves with them. Saxo adds that this insulting punishment was formerly reserved for persons who had been guilty of "parricidium." According to Saxo VIII. p. 413 Iarmericus hanged his nephews, whom he had captured in war. In Hamðismál 18 Hamðir and Sqrli, on their arrival at the court of Iqrmunrekr, find "their" (or "his") "sister's son hanging wounded on the beam, the wind-cold tree of the criminal, west of the palace." Possibly this is a reference to the same event. In v. 22 of the same poem Iqrmunrekr commands his men to hang Hamðir and Sqrli. Hanging was a frequent method of executing capital punishment, especially, it seems, in the case of persons guilty of adultery or seduction. The most famous case is the hanging of Hagbarðr (Hagbarthus; Saxo VII. p. 345), to which reference is frequently made in Scandinavian poetry. So also, according to Skáldskaparmál 47, Iqrmunrekr has his son Randver hanged, when he hears that he has committed adultery with his wife Svanhildr. In Saxo's account (VIII. p. 413 f.) of the same event, where Randver is called Broderus, the punishment is only formal. A case of suicide by hanging is given by Saxo I. p. 60. Hundingus had been drowned in a vat at a wake held through false news of Hadingus' death; Hadingus on hearing the news hanged himself in the sight of his people. There are two examples from foreign sources which prove the great antiquity of sacrificial hanging among the Swedes. Procopius (Gothic War II. 15) says that the sacrifice which is most valued by the people of Thule (i.e. Sweden and Norway), is that of the first man whom they capture in war. "This sacrifice they offer to Ares since they believe

<sup>1</sup> If the legends are true, these can not of course be accepted as evidence for a Scandinavian custom.

him to be the greatest of the gods. They sacrifice the prisoner not merely by slaughtering him but by hanging him from a beam, or casting him among thorns, or putting him to death by other horrible methods<sup>1</sup>." In *Beowulf* 2939 the Swedish king *Ongenþeo*, after slaying *Hæðcyn*, king of the *Geatas*, and besieging the remnants of his army in a wood, is represented as threatening the fugitives "that in the morning he would destroy them with the edge of the sword; some he would hang on gallows-trees as a joy to the birds (?)"<sup>2</sup>. The period, to which *Procopius'* information about "Thule" applies, is the first half of the sixth century. In all probability the same is true also of *Beowulf* (cf. p. 50), though *Ongenþeo*, who is rather a person of the past to the chief characters in the story, may have died before A.D. 500.

It is true that *Othin* is not mentioned in any of these passages, except in the one quoted from *Procopius*, where *Arcs* is probably meant for *Othin*<sup>3</sup>. Yet that these sacri-

<sup>1</sup> τῶν δὲ ἱερῶν σφίσι τὸ κάλλιστον ἀνθρωπὸς ἐστὶν ὅνπερ ἂν δοριάλωτον ποιήσαιντο πρῶτον. τοῦτον γὰρ τῷ Ἄρει θύουσιν ἐπεὶ θεὸν αὐτὸν νομίζουσι μέγιστον εἶναι. ἱερῶνται δὲ καὶ τὸν αἰχμάλωτον οὐ θύοντες μόνον ἀλλὰ καὶ ἀπὸ ξύλου κρεμῶντες ἢ ἐς τὰς ἀκάνθας ῥιπτοῦντες ταῖς ἄλλαις τε κτείναντες θανάτου ἰδέαισι οἰκτίσταις.

<sup>2</sup> cwæð he on mergenne meces ecgum  
getan wolde, sum(e) on galgtreowu(m)  
(fuglum) to gamene.

the bracketed letters have been added as the text is defective.

<sup>3</sup> For the identification of *Othin* with *Mars* the following passages may be compared:—

*Saxo* II. p. 106. *Biarco* : Et nunc ille ubi sit qui uulgo dicitur *Othin* etc.

*Ruta* : Adde oculum propius et nostras prospice chelas,  
ante sacraturus uictrici lumina signo,  
si uis presentem tuto cognoscere Martem.

*Saxo* VIII. p. 399. *Castra* quietis inops colui, pacemque perosus  
sub signis, *Gradiue*, tuis discrimine summo  
consenui,

That *Gradius* is here meant for *Othin* is shown by the fact that *Starcatherus*, in whose mouth these words are put, was *Othin's* foster-son.

fices were intended for him is made probable by the following considerations: (1) It was customary to sacrifice prisoners to Othin on the battlefield (cf. p. 6 ff.); there is no record of such sacrifices being offered to any other god. (2) There is no mention of hanging in sacrifices to other gods. Human victims were indeed offered to Thor, but these appear to have been put to death by being felled with a club or other wooden instrument. On the other hand the association of Othin with the gallows is frequently mentioned. Among his names (besides *Galga-farmr* "burden of the gallows," which perhaps has reference to Háv. 138 f.), we find *Galga-gramr*, *Galga-valdr*, *Hanga-dróttinn*, *Hanga-týr*, *Hanga-guð* etc., all denoting "lord" or "god of the gallows." According to Ynglinga s. 7 Othin was in the habit of sitting under a gallows. The passage perhaps refers to an obscure verse of Hávamál (155), the meaning of which seems to be as follows: "If I see a strangled corpse swinging upon a tree, I cut and paint 'runes' (on the body?) in such a way, that the man comes and talks with me<sup>1</sup>." With this may be compared an unpublished passage of Jónsvíkinga-drápa 3 quoted by Vigfusson (Dict. p. 238 b): "I did not get the share of Othin under the gallows"<sup>2</sup> which Vigfusson takes to mean "I am no adept in poetry." There can be no reasonable doubt that the hanging of prisoners taken in war was regarded as a sacrifice to Othin. It is at least probable

Cf. Adam of Bremen iv. 26: Wodanem uero sculpunt armatum sicut nostri Martem solent.

<sup>1</sup> ef ek sé á tré uppi  
váfa virgilná,  
svá ek rist  
ok í runum fák  
at sá gengr gumi  
ok mælir við mik.

<sup>2</sup> nam ek eigi Yggjar feng und hanga.

also that in such cases as those quoted above, the hanging of criminals was regarded in the same light. For the close connection between sacrifice and capital punishment it will be sufficient here to refer to Golther, *Mythologie* p. 548 f.

Since therefore both the javelin and the gallows appear to have been in a certain sense sacred to Othin, and further since the javelin was used in dedicating enemies and the gallows in sacrificing prisoners, it seems to me unnecessary to suppose with Bugge that the story of Vikar has been influenced by the myth related in Háv. 138. On the contrary there is every probability that it represents the ordinary ceremony of sacrifice; the combination of hanging and stabbing being parallel to the combination of strangling and stabbing in Ibn Fazlan's story (p. 43). This was of course not the only method of sacrificing to Othin. Another and simpler plan was to set the house on fire when the victim was asleep within (cf. Yngl. 47). The cutting of the 'blood-eagle' upon Ella (Orkneyinga s. 8, Ragnars s. Loðbrókar 18, Saxo ix. p. 463; see p. 6) was a sacrifice; but there is nothing to show that it was a rite of frequent occurrence<sup>1</sup>. From the evidence which is at present available there is every reason to suppose that hanging, whether accompanied by stabbing or not, was the method usually employed.

In Ynglinga s. 6 f. Othin is celebrated as the inventor of poetry (*skáldskapr*), and as proficient in, if not actually the inventor of incantations (*galdrar*) and runes. To Othin also is attributed (Yngl. 8) the establishment of the three annual Swedish sacrifices. Besides these, there are two institutions attributed to Othin

Customs,  
the institu-  
tion of  
which is  
ascribed to  
Othin.

<sup>1</sup> Another case is mentioned in *Reginmál* 26.



which require notice: (1) the 'wedge' order of battle, (2) Othin's ordinances in regard to the disposal of the dead.

1. The 'wedge' (O. Norse *rani*, *svínfylking*, *hamalt fylkia*) is known to Othin only, though it is taught by him to his heroes: e.g. in *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* 8 (F.A.S. I. 380). Haraldr (Hilditönn) says: "Who can have taught Hringr to draw up his army in wedge-shaped array (*hamalt at fylkia*); I thought this was known to none except myself and Othin. Does Othin wish to play me false in the awarding of victory?" In Saxo's account of the same event (VIII. p. 390) Haraldus is represented as asking whence Ringo could have derived this knowledge, "especially since Othynus was the teacher and inventor of this science, and no one except himself had received this new teaching in warfare." Othinus is represented as drawing up Haraldus' forces in this manner in his war against Ingo king of the Swedes (Saxo VII. p. 363). So also in Saxo I. p. 52 f., when Hadingus is fighting against the Byarmenses, his army is drawn up in wedge-array by 'an old man' who is clearly Othin.

In connection with Othin's institutions in war a passage from *Ynglinga* s. 6 deserves mention: "Othin's men went without coats of mail and were raving like hounds or wolves; they bit into their shields and were as strong as bears or buffaloes; they slaughtered the enemy, and neither fire nor iron had any effect on them. This is called *berserksgangr*." Taken in connection with the fact that the javelin appears to be Othin's sacred weapon, this would seem to show that the worshippers of Othin at one time practised light-armed warfare, working themselves up into a frenzy before the battle began<sup>1</sup>. The

<sup>1</sup> The conception of the berserkr seems also to contain mythological features.

sword, helmet and mail coat are of course not unknown to Othin, but they figure much less prominently than the javelin.

2. Othin's funeral institutions are described in *Ynglinga s. 8*:—"He ordained that all dead men should be burnt and brought on to the pyre with their property. He said that every dead man should come to Valhøll with such property as he had on the pyre; he should also have the enjoyment of what he had himself buried in the earth. But the ashes were to be carried out to sea or buried down in the earth. A howe (mound) was to be raised as a memorial to noblemen; and for all such persons as had achieved any distinction 'bauta-stones' should be set up. This custom lasted long after." As regards the nature of the 'property' thrown on to the pyre, it seems to have comprised not only arms, gold, silver and other such things, but also animals, and occasionally even servants. Saxo (*viii. p. 391*) describes at length the burning of Haraldus (*Hilditōnn*). Ringo took his horse and harnessed it to the royal chariot which was furnished with golden seats. He laid the body of Haraldus in the chariot and prayed that thus provided he might "arrive in Tartarus before his comrades and beg Pluto, the lord of Orcus, to grant peaceful abodes both for his allies and foes." He then placed the chariot on the pyre, and, as the flames rose, he implored his nobles to throw their arms, their gold, and whatever wealth they had with them, unstintingly on to the pyre, in honour of so great a king. In *Sögubrot af fornkonungum 9* (*F.A.S. i. 387*) the body of Haraldr is buried in a howe, but otherwise the description of the event agrees closely with that given by Saxo. "Hringr had a great howe made, and had the body of Haraldr laid in the chariot and driven therein to the howe with the

horse which Haraldr had had in the battle. The horse was then killed. Then King Hringr took the saddle on which he had himself ridden, and gave it to his kinsman, King Haraldr, and begged him to do whichever he wished, whether to ride or drive to Valhöll. Then he had a great feast made in honour of the departure of his kinsman, King Haraldr. And before the howe was closed, King Hringr asked all his great men and all his champions who were present to cast great jewels and good weapons into the howe, in honour of King Haraldr Hilditönn: and afterwards the howe was carefully closed." So also at the burning of Balder described in Gylf. 49, Balder's horse and the ring Draupnir were laid on the pyre. At the funeral of Sigurðr and Brynhildr, described in Völsunga s. 31 (F.A.S. i. 204), two hawks and a number of men-servants and maidservants were burnt<sup>1</sup>. In Ibn Fazlan's account of a 'Russian' funeral on the Volga there were burnt a young woman, a dog, a cock and hen, two horses and two oxen (cf. p. 43).

There is a most remarkable correspondence between the funeral rites described in the last section and the rites of sacrifice. It was believed that the spirits of the dead passed to Valhöll, and it was for their use there that animals and other articles were burnt upon the pyre (cf. Yngl. s. 8). Perhaps the most striking illustration of this belief is the passage from Sögubrot af fornkonungum (c. 9), relating to the burial of Haraldr Hilditönn. Hringr gives Haraldr, together with a horse, both a chariot and a saddle, in order that he may have his choice of riding or driving to Valhöll. But it has been shown above (p. 9 f.) that persons who were killed in battle were regarded as passing to Valhöll, and

Conclu-  
sion: the  
character of  
the cult.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Sigurðarkviða in skamma 67 ff., where modern editors have added 'two dogs.'

at the same time their death was regarded as a sacrifice to Othin. Even in other sacrifices the regular formula employed, when slaying the victim, was 'I give thee to Othin.' The victim must therefore have been regarded as passing to Valhøll. This is confirmed by the expression used in Gautreks s. 7, 'Othin desired a man out of their company.' The story of the sacrifice in Hervarar s. 11 f. (cf. p. 5) affords a close parallel. The same idea also underlies the story of Aun sacrificing his sons in Ynglinga s. 29. If further confirmation were needed it is supplied by the following curious fact: at sacrifices—at all events at the great nine-yearly sacrifices—animals were offered together with men; these were, in part, not edible animals such as were offered as a meal to Frö and other gods, but precisely the same animals which were most usually burnt upon the pyre at funerals, namely horses, dogs and hawks<sup>1</sup>. But, further, these animals seem to have been intended rather for the use of the persons sacrificed, when they arrived in Valhøll, than as an offering to the gods. This is clearly shown by Thietmar's description of the sacrifice at Leire (Thietmari Chronicon I. 9, M.G. III. p. 739): "There is a general gathering at this place every nine years, in the month of January, after the season at which we celebrate the Epiphany. Here they sacrifice to their gods ninety-nine men and the same number of horses together with dogs and cocks which they offer in place of hawks. They are convinced, as I have said, that these animals will be at the service of the human victims when they reach the powers below, and that they will appease these powers for the sins which the men have committed<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Horses were certainly eaten by the ancient Scandinavians, but it is not likely that dogs and hawks were ever used as articles of food in the North.

<sup>2</sup> Est unus in his partibus locus...Lederun nomine...ubi post nouem

At the corresponding sacrifice at Upsala, described by Adam of Bremen (IV. 27), it is stated that "nine male animals of every kind are offered; with the blood of these it is their custom to propitiate the gods." Seventy-two animals were counted, but only men, dogs and horses are specifically mentioned: "There (i.e. in the grove, cf. p. 16) hang dogs and horses together with men. One of the Christians told me that he had seen seventy-two of these bodies hanging interspersed<sup>1</sup>." Whatever may have been the original idea of this sacrifice, whether it was intended as an offering of firstlings or not<sup>2</sup>, the mention of dogs makes it likely that in Adam's time it was regarded in much the same way as the sacrifice at Leire. Elsewhere the sacrificing of animals together with men does not appear to be mentioned. Yet it is curious that the dog and hawk should be mentioned by Saxo (VIII. p. 414) in connection with the hanging of Broderus. Possibly the story had originally a different form. In *Skáldskaparmál* 47 and *Völsunga s.* 40 only the hawk is mentioned. Saxo also states (VIII. p. 411; cf. p. 17 above) that Iarmericus hanged forty Slavs together with wolves, and says further

annos, mense Ianuario, post hoc tempus quo nos theophaniam domini celebramus, omnes conuenerunt et ibi diis suismet xcix. homines et totidem equos cum canibus et gallis pro acciptribus oblati immolant, pro certo, ut predixi, putantes hos eisdem erga inferos seruituros et commissa crimina apud eosdem placaturos.

<sup>1</sup> Sacrificium itaque tale est. ex omni animante quod masculinum est nouem capita offeruntur, quorum sanguine deos placari mos est..... ibi etiam canes et equi pendent cum hominibus, quorum corpora mixtim suspensa narrauit mihi aliquis christianorum LXXII. uidisse. According to Schol. 137 the sacrifice lasted nine days, one animal of each kind, including a man, being offered every day.

<sup>2</sup> A somewhat similar custom prevailed among the Gauls according to Diodorus v. 32: "They keep their criminals and impale them in sacrifice to the gods every five years, consecrating them with many other offerings and making pyres of immense size." (τοὺς γὰρ κακούργους κατὰ πενταετηρίδα φυλάξαντες ἀνασκοπίζουσι τοῖς θεοῖς καὶ μετ' ἄλλων πολλῶν ἀπαρχῶν καθαγίζουσι, πυρὰς παμμεγέθεις κατασκευάζοντες.)

that this was in early times the punishment for 'parri-  
cidium.' It is probable that in these cases the wolf was  
substituted for the dog in order to disgrace the victim on  
his arrival in Valhøll.

Modern writers have been much perplexed by  
Thietmar's account of the sacrifice at Leire, and it has  
been suggested that he confused the rites of sacrifice  
with the funeral ceremonies of the heathen Danes. This  
supposition seems to me incredible; the sacrifice at Leire,  
like that at Upsala, took place every nine years, and the  
animals sacrificed in both cases included men, horses and  
dogs. The season, it is true, was different, yet the time  
of the Leire sacrifice coincides with that of one of the  
great annual festivals, namely Yule. The true explana-  
tion of Thietmar's story is rather to be found in the fact  
that the funeral rites and the sacrificial rites of the  
heathen Scandinavians were in great measure identical.  
Othin is a 'god of the dead' and it is to his abode,  
Valhøll ('the hall of the slain'), that the spirits of the  
dead pass. 'To give to Othin' is to kill; 'to go to  
Othin' is to die (especially in battle). In the description  
of the funeral of Haraldr Hilditønn in Sögubrot af  
fornkonungum, Haraldr is represented as riding or driving  
to Valhøll; in Saxo's account 'Tartara' is used obviously  
with the same meaning. So when, in the passage im-  
mediately following, Haraldus is to pray Pluto the lord of  
Orcus (*prestitem Orci Plutonem*), it is clear that this means  
'Othin the lord of Valhøll.' In Saxo II. p. 104 Biarco  
says: "It is no mean or unknown race, it is not the ashes  
or the worthless souls of the commons that Pluto seizes;  
it is the doom of the mighty which he compasses; he fills  
Phlegethon with renowned forms<sup>1</sup>."

<sup>1</sup> Non humile obscurumue genus non funera plebis  
Pluto rapit uilesque animas, sed fata potentum  
implicat, et claris complet Phlegethonta figuris.

With this may be compared *Hárbarðsljóð* 24: "Othin possesses the nobles who fall in battle, but Thor has the race of serfs<sup>1</sup>."

Possibly the portraiture of Othin, as he appears in the Sagas, with black cloak and deep-falling hood, is due to his character as god of the dead. There can be no doubt that Thietmar's expression *erga inferos* means "with Othin in Valhøll." It appears, at first sight, somewhat singular that these victims, who in late times were as a rule probably either criminals or slaves<sup>2</sup>, should be regarded as passing to Valhøll, and also that they should be provided with horses, dogs and hawks for their use there; the fact is however capable of explanation. The underlying idea in sacrifice to Othin is that of substitution. King Aun sacrifices his sons to Othin in order that he may have his own life prolonged. King Heiðrekr makes a great slaughter of the *Reiðgotar* as a ransom to Othin for the life of his son Angantýr (cf. p. 4). A man may save his own life only by giving that of another man, and similarly the state must offer human sacrifices in order to ensure its own preservation and success. The victims may themselves be regarded as worthless, but since they are going to Valhøll, they must be provided with such articles as are thrown on to the pyre of distinguished warriors. It is quite possible that slaves and criminals were not the persons originally chosen to serve as victims; from the legendary sagas one would gather that these

<sup>1</sup> Óðinn á iarla  
þá er í val falla,  
en þórr á þræla kyn.

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Bonifacius (A.D. 732) Pope Gregorius III. complained that certain Christians were in the habit of selling their slaves to the heathen, who bought them for victims at their sacrifices. *Jaffé, Bibliotheca*, III. 94.

were frequently selected from a very different class. This change in the status of the human victims seems to harmonise with the fact that apparently no very great care was taken to provide the proper animals, cocks being sacrificed instead of hawks, which were no doubt not so easy to obtain. The change may therefore point to a decay in the vitality of the religion.

In regard to the belief in Valhǫll there are several questions which have not yet been satisfactorily answered. Apparently not all the spirits of the dead were believed to pass thither; indeed if one may judge from the vows of Haraldus, as related by Saxo (cf. p. 7 f.), it would seem that not all even of those who were killed in battle necessarily reached Valhǫll. On the other hand the practice of marking a dying man with a javelin was probably regarded as a substitution for death in battle (cf. p. 13 f.), and thus as conferring the right of admission to Valhǫll. There is no evidence to support the statement quoted above from Hárbarðsljóð that the souls of serfs passed to Thor. Thor does not elsewhere appear as a god of the dead, and the statement may perhaps be due to the fact that Thor was especially the god of the lower classes, while Othin was worshipped chiefly, if not solely, by the nobles. Lastly it is not improbable that Valhǫll has been confused to some extent with Ásgarðr ("the court of the *Æsir*"), though originally the two conceptions would seem to have been essentially different. It is noticeable that in the old poetry the terms *Ásgarðr* and *Ásagarðr* occur usually in poems dealing with Thor. Perhaps the doctrine of the "end of the world" was originally connected rather with Ásgarðr than with Valhǫll.



## CHAPTER II.

### TRACES OF THE CULT OF WODEN ON THE CONTINENT AND IN BRITAIN.

OUTSIDE the limits of the Scandinavian area very few traces of the cult of Woden have been preserved. Yet there is evidence enough to show that the two chief sides of the god's character which are presented in Ynglinga s. 6, 7, namely the crafty, magical, bardic side on the one hand, and the warlike side on the other, were both known to the non-Scandinavian Germans. The first appears from the Latin interpretation (Mercurius) and from the Merseburg magical verses. So also in the Old English Leechdoms (III. 34, 23) Woden is represented as dealing in divination: "then Woden took nine 'twigs of glory' (chips for divination); then he struck the adder so that it flew in nine pieces<sup>1</sup>." It is possible also that the ancient English regarded him as the inventor of the (Runic) alphabet. In the dialogue of Salomon and Saturn the following passage occurs: "Tell me who first invented letters? I tell thee, Mercurius the giant" (*Mercurius se gygand*). It is, of course, possible that the Graeco-Latin god is meant. There is another possible reference in the Runic poem l. 10:—"Os' is the beginning of every

<sup>1</sup> *ða genam Woden viii. wuldortanas, sloh ða ða næddran ðæt heo on viii. to fleah.*

speech" etc.<sup>1</sup> The meaning of the passage is exceedingly obscure. It is not unlikely that the poem has been revised by some person who did not thoroughly understand his original. In the older poem *os* might have meant Woden. On the other hand Wodan (Woden) as the giver of victory is most clearly depicted in the Langobardic saga (*Origo Gentis Langob.*; Paulus, *Historia Langob.* I. 8). In this character he was known also to the English, cf. Ethelwerd II. 2: "the pagans afterwards worshipped Woden as a god with sacrilegious honour, and offered him sacrifice for the acquisition of victory or valour<sup>2</sup>."

Sacrifices to Woden are mentioned by Tacitus (*Germ.* 9) who states that "they consider it right to sacrifice even human victims to Mercurius on certain fixed days<sup>3</sup>." According to Jonas of Bobbio (*Mabillon, Acta sanctorum ord. Bened.* II. p. 26) Columbanus (about A.D. 620) found a party of Sueui engaged in "sacrifice" to Wodan. They were sitting round a large vessel full of beer; but the nature of the ceremony is not described. According to Ethelwerd sacrifices were offered by the English to Woden (see above).

The custom of devoting a hostile army to Woden (cf. p. 7) was also known to the continental Germans. The clearest case occurs in Tacitus' description of the war between the Chatti and the Hermunduri (*Ann.* XIII. 57):—"The war turned out successfully for the Hermunduri, while for the Chatti it was all the more disastrous, because in the event of victory they (i.e. both

<sup>1</sup> *os byþ orðfruma ælcra spræce....*

<sup>2</sup> *Voddan...quem post infanda dignitate ut deum honorantes sacrificium obtulerunt pagani uictoriae causa siue uirtutis.*

<sup>3</sup> *Deorum maxime Mercurium colunt, cui certis diebus, humanis quoque hostiis litare fas habent.*

sides) had dedicated their opponents' army to Mars and Mercurius. By this vow both horses and men, in short everything on the side of the conquered is given up to destruction. And so the threats of our enemies recoiled upon themselves<sup>1</sup>." Another example of the total destruction of an army, which may very well have been due to a vow of this kind, is supplied by Tacitus' account of the scene of Varus' disaster (Ann. I. 61). It seems likely also that the English invaders of Britain practised a similar rite, if one may judge from certain entries in the Saxon Chronicle, especially the entry under the year 491:—"Ælle and Cissa besieged Anderida and slaughtered all who dwelt therein; there was not a single Briton left there<sup>2</sup>." It has been mentioned above (p. 7) that amongst the Scandinavians this dedication was symbolized by the casting of a javelin over the enemy's army. Some such idea may have been in the mind of Coifi, the chief priest of the Northumbrians, who according to Bede (H. E. II. 13), as soon as he had given his vote for the change of faith, hurled a spear into the heathen temple. A very early example of the total destruction of a vanquished army in obedience to a vow of this kind is given by Orosius v. 16. After narrating the defeat of Caepio and Mallius by the Cimbri (B.C. 105) he proceeds:—"The enemy captured both camps and acquired an immense quantity of booty. They proceeded to destroy everything which they had captured in accordance with a novel and unusual vow. The clothing was

<sup>1</sup> Sed bellum Hermunduris prosperum, Chattis exitiosius fuit, quia uictores diuersam aciem Marti ac Mercurio sacrauere, quo uoto equi, uiri, cuncta uicta occidioni dantur. et minae quidem hostiles in ipsos uertebant. It is noticeable that the god Mars, i.e. Tiwaz, is here associated with Mercurius (Woden); cf. also Orosius vii. 37.

<sup>2</sup> Her Ælle and Cissa ymbæston Andredes cester and ofslogon alle þa be þær inne eardedon, ne wearþ þær forþon án Bret to lafe.

torn to shreds and cast away; the gold and silver was thrown into the river; the corslets of the men were cut to pieces; the trappings of the horses were broken up; the horses themselves were drowned in the waters; the men were hanged on trees, with nooses round their necks. No booty was allowed to the conqueror and no pity to the conquered<sup>1</sup>." It is true that the nationality of the Cimbri and Teutones has not yet been satisfactorily ascertained. On the whole the evidence is perhaps somewhat against the supposition that these tribes were Germanic. Yet there is no doubt that they had lived in the closest proximity to Germanic tribes, and consequently they may have shared their religious beliefs and usages. The practice of destroying even the inanimate property of a vanquished enemy was known among the Germans of the North at a much later time, probably as late as the fourth century. This is shown by the immense quantities of weapons and other articles, which have been found deposited in the bogs of Thorsbjærg and Nydam (in Slesvig and South Jutland)<sup>2</sup>.

A most singular custom is attributed by Procopius (Gothic War II. 14) to the Eruli, a tribe which it has hitherto proved impossible to identify with certainty with any of the Germanic nations known in later times. Procopius states simply that they lived formerly beyond the Danube, but his acquaintance with the geography of northern Europe was apparently not extensive. The Eruli are first mentioned in the third century, at which

<sup>1</sup> *Hostes binis castris atque ingenti praeda potiti noua quadam atque insolita exsecratione cuncta quae ceperant pessum dederunt: uestis discissa et proiecta est, aurum argentumque in flumen obiectum, loricae uirorum concisae, phaleræ equorum disperditæ, equi ipsi gurgitibus immersi, homines laqueis collo' inditis ex arboribus suspensi sunt ita ut nihil prædæ uictor, nihil misericordiæ uictus adgnosceret.*

<sup>2</sup> See Engelhardt, *Denmark in the Early Iron Age*.

time they appear almost simultaneously on the Black Sea and on the frontier of Gaul. On the whole it seems most probable that their original home was on the southern shores of the Baltic. However this may be, it is quite clear that they were a Germanic tribe and still heathen when part of them were admitted into the Roman empire by Anastasius (A.D. 512). They seem to have been the only important Germanic tribe known to Procopius which had preserved their heathendom till within living memory; for the Goths, Vandals, Gepedes, and Langobardi had long been Christian, and even the Franks were nominally converted before the end of the fifth century, though according to Procopius (G. W. II. 25) they still continued to practise human sacrifices. There seems to be no adequate reason for doubting that the cult of Woden was known to the Eruli. It was certainly practised by all the tribes whose territories lay along the Elbe, the Saxons, Langobardi and Hermunduri; probably also by the Goths whose original home lay far to the East. Procopius simply states that the Eruli worshipped a great number of gods, whom they deemed it right to appease with human sacrifices. There is however some evidence of a different kind (cf. p. 39 f.), which would seem to show that the Eruli had preserved one feature of the cult in a singularly pure form. Procopius' statement about the customs of the Eruli is as follows:—"They had many laws which differed from those of the rest of mankind; for when they became aged or sick they were not allowed to live. As soon as one of them was overtaken by old age or disease it became incumbent on him to request his relatives to put him out of the way as quickly as possible. The relatives made a great pile of logs, reaching to a considerable height, and setting the man on the top they sent up one of the Eruli against him with a dagger. This

man had to be chosen from another family, for it was not lawful that the executioner should be related to the victim. And when the man who had been chosen to slay their kinsman had returned, they proceeded forthwith to set all the logs on fire, beginning at the extremities of the pile. When the fire had died out they collected the bones and buried them without delay in the ground<sup>1</sup>." Reference has already been made (p. 13 f.) to a custom, which would seem to have prevailed among the ancient Scandinavians, of marking a dying man with the point of a javelin; and it has been pointed out that the passage in Ynglinga s. 10, in which this rite is described, implies that it was regarded as a substitution for death in battle. Now is it possible that this rite was a relic of a still earlier custom, according to which the dying man was actually stabbed to death? Such an explanation would obviously harmonise very well with the purpose of the rite, and it would be in full accord with the general conception of Othin and Valhøll (cf. p. 26 f.). Then the custom attributed to the Eruli at the end of the fifth or beginning of the sixth century will represent simply an earlier stage in the history of the same rite. It is true that the weapon used by the Eruli is stated to have been a dagger and not a javelin; but a discrepancy in such a detail as this may be due to inaccuracy on the part of

<sup>1</sup> νόμοις δὲ πολλοῖς οὐ κατὰ ταῦτα τοῖς ἄλλοις ἀνθρώποις ἐχρῶντο. οὔτε γὰρ γηράσκουσιν οὔτε νοσοῦσιν αὐτοῖς βιοτεύειν ἐξήν, ἀλλ' ἐπειδὴν τις αὐτῶν ἢ γῆρα ἢ νόσῳ ἀλγῆ ἐπάναγκές οἱ ἐγένετο τοὺς συγγενεῖς αἰτεῖσθαι ὅτι τάχιστα ἐξ ἀνθρώπων αὐτὸν ἀφανίσουν. οἱ δὲ ξύλα πολλὰ ἐς μέγα τι ὕψος ξυννήσαντες καθίσαντες τε τὸν ἄνθρωπον ἐν τῇ τῶν ξύλων ὑπερβολῇ τῶν τινα Ἐροῦλων ἀλλότριον μέντοι σὺν ξιφιδίῳ παρ' αὐτὸν ἐπεμπον. συγγενὴ γὰρ αὐτῷ τὸν φονέα εἶναι οὐ θέμις. ἐπειδὴν δὲ αὐτοῖς ὁ τοῦ συγγενοῦς φονεὺς ἐπαγγεί, ξύμπαντα ἑκαὶ οὐκ αὐτίκα τὰ ξύλα, ἐκ τῶν ἐσχάτων ἀρξάμενοι. πανσαμένης τε αὐτοῖς τῆς φλογὸς ξυλλέξαντες τὰ ὅσα τὸ παραντικὰ τῇ γῇ ἐκρυπτον. (For the continuation of this passage see p. 41.)

Procopius. Examples of voluntary death in the Scandinavian legends are rare. Yet there are two cases of special significance: Hadingus, a hero who frequently appears under Othin's protection, commits suicide by hanging himself (Saxo i. p. 60)<sup>1</sup>, and Starcatherus, the foster-son of Othin and his typical hero, requests and receives death at the hand of Hatherus (Saxo viii. p. 405 f.). In the latter case the killing is done with a sword. A singular custom of killing the old is mentioned in Gautreks s. 1, 2 (F. A. S. iii. p. 7 ff.). The victims suffered voluntarily; man and wife were put to death together by being thrown over a precipice. Among the Germans of the Continent, there is, so far as I am aware, no evidence for any such custom beyond the passage quoted above from Procopius. Tacitus only says (Germ. 6) that persons who have succeeded in making their escape after a disastrous battle, and have lost their shields in so doing, frequently strangle themselves to death, and so put an end to their dishonour<sup>2</sup>. With this passage may be compared Ragnars s. Loðbrókar c. 9 (F. A. S. i. 261 ff.), where the defeated Eirekr son of Ragnar is offered full freedom and favour by king Eysteinn, yet prefers to be killed (probably as a sacrifice). The survivors of the Cimbri also killed themselves after the battle of Vercellae according to Plutarch (Marius 27, see below), and their wives followed their example. The same was the case with the women of the Teutones after the battle of Aquae Sextiae (Florus iii. 3; Hieronymus, Ep. ad Ageruchiam).

Very little is known of the ritual practised by the ancient

<sup>1</sup> It is perhaps worth calling to mind that Hadingus was probably, in origin, identical with Njǫrðr. Saxo's account of Hadingus' suicide may therefore have some bearing on the passage in Ynglinga s. 11, which states that "Njǫrðr had himself marked for Othin."

<sup>2</sup> Multique superstites bellorum infamiam laqueo finierunt.

Germans in their human sacrifices<sup>1</sup>. The general employment of hanging however as a means of capital punishment renders it probable that this was at least one of the methods practised. According to Tacitus (Germ. 12) "traitors and deserters were hanged on trees," while cowards and others were suffocated in marshes. The officers of Varus' army, according to Tacitus (Ann. i. 61) were "slaughtered at the altars"; some of the troops appear to have been buried alive, others possibly were hanged<sup>2</sup>. The custom of hanging captured enemies was certainly known to the Goths. Thus according to Jordanes (c. 48) the Ostrogothic king Vinitharius, in order to strike terror into the Anti, hanged their king Boz with his sons and seventy of their nobles<sup>3</sup>. Hanging seems to have been much practised by the Cimbri. In Orosius' account of the Roman disaster on the Rhone, the Roman captives are stated to have been hanged on the trees (cf. p. 31 f.). After their defeat at Vercellae, according to Plutarch (Marius 27), the fugitives attempted to hang themselves by any means that lay ready to hand:—"As there were no trees at hand the men tied their necks, some to the horns and some to the legs of the oxen; then they applied goads to the oxen and, as the latter rushed off, they were dragged along and crushed, and thus met their death<sup>4</sup>." According to the same chapter (cf. Florus III. 3) the women also either hanged or strangled themselves. The expression

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Golther, *Mythologie* 561 ff.

<sup>2</sup> If *patibula* is here used for 'gallows.'

<sup>3</sup> This story affords a curious confirmation to Saxo's account of Iarmericus. According to Jord. 14 Vinitharius was the great-nephew of Hermanaricus (Iarmericus). Vinitharius would seem to have reigned towards the end of the fourth century.

<sup>4</sup> τοὺς δ' ἄνδρας ἀπορία δένδρων τοῖς κέρασι τῶν βοῶν τοὺς δὲ τοῖς σκέλεσι προσδεῖν αὐτῶν τραχήλους· εἴτα κέντρα προσφέροντας ἐξαλλομένων τῶν βοῶν ἐφελκομένους καὶ πατομένους ἀπόλλυσθαι.



*ἀπορία δένδρων* "through lack of trees" deserves consideration, because it distinctly implies the existence of some suicidal rite in which tree-hanging formed an essential feature. There is not however sufficient evidence for determining whether the rite was practised generally or only under special conditions. It is conceivable, for instance, that some vow had been made which involved death in case of defeat. On the other hand it is possible that the Cimbri, like the later Eruli, held it unlawful to die a natural death; consequently, when all hope of further successful fighting was gone, sacrificial suicide was the only course left open.

The allusions to the prevalence of hanging among the Cimbri are so frequent that there can be little doubt that they practised either the cult of Woden or at least some cult which employed very similar rites. An account of their methods of sacrifice is given by Strabo (VII. p. 294). "Their women accompanied them on their march and were attended by holy prophetesses with gray hair and white clothing. These had linen mantles fastened by a buckle, bronze girdles and bare feet. When prisoners were brought into the camp, they met them sword in hand and, after consecrating them, they led them to a bronze bowl, capable of holding about twenty amphorae. They had a ladder on which she climbed...<sup>1</sup>. Standing above the bowl she cut each man's throat as he hung suspended. They practised divination from the blood as it gushed out into the bowl. Others slit them asunder and disembowelled them, proclaiming victory to their own people<sup>2</sup>." With the last sentence may be compared the

<sup>1</sup> The text is corrupt here.

<sup>2</sup> ...ταῖς γυναῖξιν αὐτῶν συστρατευούσαις παρηκολούθουν προμάντιες ἱέρειαι πολιορκητρῆς, λευχείμονες, καρπασίνας ἐφαπτίδας ἐπιπεπορημέναι, ζῶσµα χαλκοῦν ἔχουσαι, γυμνόποδες· ταῖς οὖν αἰχµαλώτοις διὰ τοῦ στρατοπέδου

Scandinavian rite of cutting the "blood-eagle" (cf. p. 20), which is represented in Orkneyinga s. 8 as a sacrifice to Othin for victory. It is noticeable that in these Cimbric sacrifices, as in the sacrifice of Vikar (cf. p. 3 f.), hanging and stabbing seem to be combined, though it is not stated that the hanging was of such a nature as in itself to cause death. For the combination of sacrifice with divination Scandinavian parallels can be found, though I am not aware that there is any evidence for the practice of divination at human sacrifices<sup>1</sup>. It ought to be mentioned however that a rite still more closely resembling that of the Cimbri is attributed by Diodorus (v. 31) to the Gauls.

The Old English poem *Beowulf* has already been quoted (p. 18) in illustration of the Scandinavian custom of hanging captured enemies. The same poem contains apparently an allusion to another very curious custom, whether English or Scandinavian is not clear. After describing how Herebeald, son of Hreðel king of the Geatas, was accidentally killed by his brother Hæðcyn, the poem goes on to describe the grief of Hreðel, concluding as follows (l. 2444 ff.):—"Thus it is grievous for an old man to endure, that his young son should ride on the gallows. Then shall he utter a dirge, a sorrowful song, when his son hangs, a joy to the raven, and he himself, aged and experienced as he is, can not help him or serve

*συνήντων ξιφῆρεις, καταστέψασαι δ' αὐτοὺς ἦγον ἐπὶ κρατῆρα χαλκοῦν ὅσον ἀμφορέων εἰκοσιν' εἶχον δὲ ἀναβάθραν ἣν ἀναβάσα.....ὑπερπέτης τοῦ λέβητος ἐλαιμοτῶμει ἑκάστον μετεωρισθέντα' ἐκ δὲ τοῦ προχομένου αἵματος εἰς τὸν κρατῆρα μαντεῖαν τινὰ ἐποιούντο, ἄλλαι δὲ διασχίσασαι ἐσπλάγχχνουν ἀναφθεγγόμεναι νίκην τοῖς οἰκέλοις.*

<sup>1</sup> Is it possible that the obscure verse (155) of *Hávamál*, quoted above (p. 19), should contain a reminiscence of some such rite as this? It is perhaps worth recalling that human blood is contained in the vessel *Öðrerir*, from which comes the gift of poetry (cf. *Bragræður* 57).

him in any way<sup>1</sup>." There is no indication that the person hanged was a criminal, and the context does not admit of the supposition that he had been captured in war. It is not quite clear how far the passage is intended as a simile. If the poet is thinking of Herebeald in l. 2445—6, it would seem to show that the bodies of dead persons were hung on the gallows. Otherwise it must be inferred that he was acquainted with some custom similar to that practised by the Eruli (p. 33 f.), though in this case death was brought about by hanging.

It has been mentioned (p. 21) that the invention of the "wedge" order of battle was ascribed to Othin by the Scandinavians. There is no evidence for the existence of such a belief among the continental Germans. The "wedge" however was well known and was recognized even in the very earliest times as the Germans' favourite method of warfare (cf. Caesar, B. G. i. 52; Tacitus, Germ. 6). It has also been suggested in explanation of Ynglinga s. 6, that the typical Othin-worshipper in early times was a light-armed warrior. Now the Germans of the first century were certainly light-armed, their favourite weapon being the javelin. Tacitus' statements (Germ. 6) convey the impression that this was due to their inability to procure defensive armour. Such however can not have been the case with the Eruli in later times, for this tribe appears to have continued to practise light-armed warfare at a time when all the neighbouring tribes were well provided with defensive armour. Jordanes (c. 23) states that "at

Customs  
in war  
associated  
with the  
cult of  
Woden.

<sup>1</sup> swa bið geomorlic gomelum ceorle  
to gebidaunc, þæt his byre ride  
giong on galgan: þonne he gyd wrece,  
sarigne sang, þonne his sunu hangað  
hrefne to hroðre and he him helpa ne mæg,  
eald and infrod ænige gefremman.

that time (i.e. in the fourth century) there was no nation which did not possess in its army a body of light-armed troops selected from among the Eruli<sup>1</sup>. In his account of the battle between the Huns and Gepidæ (Gepedes) he compares the light equipment of the Eruli with the heavy armour of the Alani (c. 50). The equipment of the Eruli is described by Procopius (Persian War, II. 25) as follows: "The Eruli wear neither helmet nor coat of mail nor any other protection except a shield and a thick cloak; girded with this they proceed to battle<sup>2</sup>." He adds that their slaves fought even without shields. Procopius' statement is corroborated by Paulus (Hist. Langobard. I. 20):—"At that time (about the end of the fifth century) the Eruli were experienced in the arts of war and had acquired great glory by the slaughter of many nations. Whether for the sake of fighting with greater freedom, or to show their contempt for any wound inflicted by the enemy, they used to fight unprotected, covering only the loins<sup>3</sup>." This absence of defensive armour is probably to be ascribed to the conservative instincts of the tribe, backed by the sanction of their religion.

In Ynglinga s. 10 Othin is stated to have instituted the custom of cremation, and to have declared that every man should possess in Valholl the property which had been burnt with him on his pyre (cf. p. 22). Cremation was practised by the ancient Germans in the time of Tacitus (Germ. 27)

Funeral  
customs  
associated  
with the  
cult of  
Woden.

<sup>1</sup> Nulla siquidem erat tunc gens quae non leuem armaturam in acie sua ex ipsis eligeret.

<sup>2</sup> οὐτε γὰρ κράνος οὐτε θώρακα οὐτε ἄλλο τι φυλακτήριον Ἑρουλοὶ ἐχουσιν ὅτι μὴ ἀσπίδα καὶ τριβώνιον ἄδρῶν δὲ δὴ διεζωσμένοι ἐς τὸν ἀγῶνα καθίστανται.

<sup>3</sup> Erant siquidem tunc Heroli bellorum usibus exerciti multorumque iam strage notissimi. qui siue ut expeditius bella gererent siue ut inlatum ab hoste uulnus contemnerent, nudi pugnabant, operientes solummodo corporis uerecunda.

and continued long after, though it had apparently been given up by the Franks before their conversion. It was practised, at least partly, by the English after their conquest of Britain, and by the Eruli until the beginning of the sixth century (cf. p. 33 f.). By the Old Saxons it seems to have been practised even towards the end of the eighth century. It was prohibited by an edict of Karl the Great in 785<sup>1</sup>. Tacitus seems to have been struck by the simplicity of the German funeral rites. He states that they had no monuments except a mound covered with grass. Yet he adds that weapons and in some cases horses were thrown on to the pyre. The funeral customs of the ancient Germans therefore did not differ essentially from those practised in the North. Procopius however (Gothic War, II. 14; cf. p. 33 f.) distinctly states that suttee was practised by the Eruli:—"When a man of the Eruli dies, it becomes incumbent on his widow, if she makes any claim to virtue and wishes to leave behind her a good reputation, to strangle herself to death without much delay beside her husband's tomb. If she does not do this, she forfeits all respect for the rest of her life and incurs the enmity of her husband's relatives<sup>2</sup>." This is, so far as I am aware, the only passage in which the practice of suttee is attributed to any Germanic tribe<sup>3</sup>. Yet a careful

<sup>1</sup> Capitula quae de partibus Saxoniae constituta sunt; c. 7: si quis corpus defuncti hominis secundum ritum paganorum flamma consumi fecerit et ossa eius ad cinerem redegerit, capite punietur. (Pertz, M. G. III. 49.)

<sup>2</sup> Ἐρούλου δὲ ἀνδρὸς τελευτήσαντος ἐπάναγκες τῇ γυναικὶ ἀρετῆς μεταποιουμένη καὶ κλέος αὐτῇ ἐθελούσῃ λείπεσθαι βρόχον ἀναψαμένη παρὰ τὸν τοῦ ἀνδρὸς τάφον οὐκ εἰς μακρὸν θνήσκειν. οὐ ποιοῦση δὲ ταῦτα περὶ ἐπιστήκει τὸ λοιπὸν ἀδόξω τε εἶναι καὶ τοῖς τοῦ ἀνδρὸς συγγενέσι προσκεκρουμένα.

<sup>3</sup> It is clear that the custom was known to the western Slavs down to comparatively late times. It is mentioned by Bonifacius in A.D. 745 (Ep. 72; ad Ethilbaldum reg. Merc.), and is stated by Thietmar of Merseburg

examination of the northern legends will reveal the fact that some such custom was not altogether unknown amongst the ancient Scandinavians. According to Saxo I. p. 46 Gunnilda, the wife of Asmundus, refused to survive her husband's death and took her life, apparently with a sword. In *Völsunga* s. 8 (F.A.S. I. 135) Signý prefers to die with her husband Siggeir, though she has brought his death about and killed the children which he had by her. In *Gylfaginning* 49 Nanna is represented as dying of grief at Balder's pyre; possibly in an earlier version of the story she committed suicide. In *Hervarar* s. 5 (F.A.S. I. 429) Ingibjörg, daughter of Yngvi (or Ingialdr) king of the Swedes, is represented as hearing of the death of Hjalmar, to whom she was betrothed. What follows is differently related in different texts; according to one text "she was so much affected by Hjalmar's fall that she straightway died of grief<sup>1</sup>;" according to another "the king's daughter can not bear to survive him and determines to put an end to her own life<sup>2</sup>." The case of Brynhildr may also be quoted (cf. *Sigurðarkviða* in *skamma*; *Völsunga* s. 31). Brynhildr was not the wife of Sigurðr, though she had desired that position. After bringing about Sigurðr's death she kills herself with a sword (*Sigurðarkv.* 48), and gives directions that she is to be burnt with Sigurðr (cf. p. 23). In the poem *Helreið Brynhildar* she is represented as driving to Valhöll. The poem concludes with the words "Sigurðr and I shall never part again<sup>3</sup>."

(VIII. 2) to have been in general use among the Poles during the latter part of the tenth century.

<sup>1</sup> fékk henni svá mikils fall Hialmars at hún sprakk þegar af harmi etc.

<sup>2</sup> en konungs dóttir má eigi lifa eptir hann ok ræðr sér siálf bana.

<sup>3</sup> vit skulum okkrum  
aldri slíta  
Sigurðr saman. (v. 14.)

Another example, dating from curiously late times, is preserved by Jakut under the article Rus (quoted by J. Grimm, *kl. Schriften* II. p. 289 ff.). A certain Ibn Fazlan, who records the story, witnessed the funeral of a noble Russian on the lower Volga, about the year 922—3. The dead man was burnt on a ship in the river. Various animals were killed and thrown on to the pyre, a dog, a cock and hen (possibly in the place of hawks, cf. p. 24), two horses and two oxen. A young woman was also killed and laid beside the dead man. It appears from Ibn Fazlan's account that she was not the wife of the dead man, but chosen from among his concubines. These were asked which of them was willing to die with their master. The offer was voluntary, but when once made, could not be retracted. The method of killing employed was a combination of strangling and stabbing, the latter being carried out by an old woman who was known as the "death's-angel." J. Grimm (*l.c.* p. 294) did not believe that these people were Scandinavians. His objections however do not seem to have been sufficiently well grounded. Ibn Fazlan distinguishes clearly between the Russians and the Slavs. That the "Russians" were Scandinavians is rendered probable by the fact that according to Constantinus Porphyrogenitus (*On the Administration of the Empire*, c. 9) the Russians and Slavs spoke different languages (*Ρωσιστί, Σκλαβινιστί*), the former of which was, to judge from his examples, undoubtedly Scandinavian<sup>1</sup>. The ship-funeral also, as related

<sup>1</sup> For further evidence to the same effect cf. Zeuss, *die Deutschen u. die Nachbarstämme*, p. 547 ff. The story of the 'Russians,' who were sent by the eastern emperor Theophilus to the emperor Ludwig in 839, especially deserves consideration: *misit etiam* (Theophilus) *cum eis quosdam, qui se, id est gentem suam, Rhos uocari dicebant.....quorum aduentus causam imperator* (i.e. Ludwig) *diligentius inuestigans, comperit eos gentis esse Sueonum etc.*

by Ibn Fazlan seems to be a distinctively Scandinavian custom. At the same time some doubt may be expressed as to whether the practice of suttee was at all common at this late period. Lastly reference may be made to a custom attributed by Bonifacius (Ep. 72, written A.D. 745) to the Old Saxons:—"In Old Saxony if a maiden brings disgrace upon her father's house by unchastity, they sometimes compel her to put an end to her life by hanging herself with her own hand. Her body is then laid on the pyre and cremated, and the partner of her guilt is hanged over her tomb<sup>1</sup>." A close parallel to this passage is afforded by Saxo's account of Hagbarthus and Sygne (VII. p. 343 ff.), a legend to which frequent reference is made in Scandinavian poetry. Hagbarthus had made his way in woman's attire to the abode of Sygne, daughter of the Danish king Sigarus. There he was arrested and condemned to death, partly on account of seducing Sygne, but partly also because he had killed two of Sigarus' sons in battle. Sygne decides to share Hagbarthus' fate and begs her handmaidens to die with her. They pile faggots against the walls of the room and make halters of their robes. When Hagbarthus is led to the gallows, he asks that his coat may first be hanged, in order that he may test Sygne's constancy. When this is notified to Sygne, whose room is some distance from the place of execution, she and her maidens, thinking that Hagbarthus is already dead, set fire to the room and push away the beams on which they were standing, thus hanging themselves. Hagbarthus, seeing the flames, meets his fate with joy. It is to be noticed that Sygne's death is entirely voluntary. Among

<sup>1</sup> Nam in antiqua Saxoniam si uirgo paternam domum cum adulterio maculauerit, aliquando cogunt eam propria manu per laqueum suspensam uitam finire et super bustum illius incensae et concrematae corruptorem eius suspendunt.



the Old Saxons on the other hand the woman was compelled to die, but stress is certainly to be laid on the words *propria manu*. She was not executed but compelled to commit suicide. The practice seems therefore to have been associated in some way with the idea of suttee. It is worth noticing also that in both cases the man is put to death by hanging. Lastly the case of the Teutones and Cimbri may be quoted. It is stated by several authors (Florus, III. 3; Plutarch, Mar. 27; Hieronymus, Ep. ad Ageruchiam) that after the battles of Aquae Sextiae and Vercellae the women of these tribes, after vainly attempting resistance, first destroyed their children and then put themselves to death, chiefly by hanging, some even using their hair for this purpose. Florus and Hieronymus indeed state that they first made an application to Marius for freedom and permission to exercise their sacerdotal office, and that they put themselves to death only when this application had failed. It would appear however that this application was only made by a small number, three hundred according to Hieronymus. These were perhaps the prophetesses mentioned by Strabo (VII. p. 294; cf. p. 37 above).

These examples are enough to show that suttee, or some very similar custom, was known to various Germanic tribes from very early times. Procopius' statement is therefore not without foundation. Whether Tacitus means to refer to any such custom in Germania 18 f. is not quite clear. One may be tempted to connect the existence of this rite with the strict views which, according to Tacitus, the ancient Germans entertained on matrimony. On the other hand it may also have had a very different origin. It might, for example, have arisen from the idea that the wife was part of the husband's property, and consequently required by him, together with his horses, dogs and hawks,

in order to complete his happiness in the next world. The latter explanation is favoured by the fact that the woman killed was apparently not always the man's lawful wife. Against this it may perhaps be objected that it is inconsistent with the Germanic conception of marriage. Yet it has still to be proved that the cult of Woden is of Germanic origin. If the cult was introduced from abroad, the same may also be true of such a rite as this; for, since the rite undoubtedly presupposes a belief in a certain kind of immortality, it may very well have been connected, even from the beginning, with the cult of Woden.

Notwithstanding the paucity of the evidence, there seems to be every reason for believing that the cult of Woden, as practised by the continental Germans in the earliest historical times, corresponded to the Scandinavian cult in all its essential features. It is clear: (1) that human victims were sacrificed to Woden; (2) that in war the enemy were sometimes dedicated to Woden, a vow which involved the slaughter of all prisoners and the destruction of all the booty; (3) that such prisoners were often put to death by hanging. The frequent occurrence of hanging as a method of punishment suggests also that human victims were regularly sacrificed to Othin in this way, but conclusive evidence is wanting. Perhaps hanging and stabbing were combined, as appears to have been the case with the Cimbri (cf. p. 37 f.). For the sacrificial use of the javelin there is hardly sufficient evidence, though it is to be remembered that this was the favourite weapon of the ancient Germans. Further it is clear (4) that certain Germanic tribes (at all events the Eruli) practised a method of warfare which showed a reckless contempt of danger and has some resemblance to the "berserksgangr" of the North; (5) that the funeral rites

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practised by the ancient Germans seem to have closely resembled those which in the North were associated with the cult of Othin. Suttee, or some very similar custom, seems to have been known both on the continent and in the North. In all these points the Scandinavian and continental cults agree. In one respect the continental cult, at all events, as practised by the Eruli, seems to have had a more primitive and barbarous form. Men were not allowed to die by disease or old age, but had to be despatched by violence on the approach of death. In the North on the other hand this act seems to be represented by a merely formal stabbing. It is possible however that in very early times the dying man was actually killed (cf. p. 34 f.).

It is clear that the Eruli worshipped a "god of the dead," and it is very probable that the Cimbri practised a cult of the same kind. That this god was Woden is rendered probable by the fact that he was the recipient of human sacrifices, and also by the "dedication" vow, though in this case he seems to have been associated with "Mars." Some conception answering to that of the Scandinavian Valhøll must therefore have prevailed among the ancient Germans. Since the poetry of heathen times is entirely lost, it is no wonder that this conception can not now be traced. Possibly we owe to it such expressions as the O.E. *neoræna wang* = paradisu. The word *wælcyrge* (*wælcyrrie*) is also of frequent occurrence in the Old English glossaries, but from the words which it is used to gloss (*Erinys*, *Tisiphona*, *Bellona* etc.), as also from its frequent appearance in the phrase *wiccean and wælcyrrian*, it would seem to have had a different meaning from the Norse *valkyria*. Since there can be little doubt that the latter is in great measure a creation of the Scandinavian poets, it is not unlikely that the English usage may reflect an

earlier conception. Possibly the word originally denoted the "promantis," who sacrificed human victims and practised divination from their blood<sup>1</sup>. The transference of the valkyrie from the earthly sphere to Valholl will in that case be a later development. It cannot, of course, be denied that the English *walcyrge* had supernatural features, but these appear rather to have been of the werewolf class.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the 'death's angel' in Ibn Fazlan's story (p. 43).

## CHAPTER III.

### THE INTRODUCTION OF THE CULT INTO THE NORTH.

SINCE the appearance of H. Petersen's book, *Om Nordboernes Gudekyrkelse og Gudetro i Hedenold* (1876), it has been generally agreed that the cult of Othin was not indigenous in the North. The date of its introduction is however very difficult to fix, even approximately. Among recent writers Golther (*Mythologie*, p. 223) holds that this took place at all events before 800; while Mogk (*Paul's Grundriss*, i. p. 1070) believes that it came to the Saxons before they settled in Britain (in the fifth century), and passed over to the North, not much later, by way of Denmark; Othin however did not become the central point of the Northern mythology before the Viking Age (*ib.* p. 1063). By an examination of all the available evidence it might perhaps be possible to arrive at a somewhat more definite result.

1. *The name "Othin" (Óðinn, from earlier \*Wōðenaz).*

It is clear that this word must have become known to the Scandinavians at a time when the loss of the sound *w*- before labial vowels had not yet ceased to operate. The loss of this sound brought about the disuse of the letter *w* in the Runic alphabet. For the name of the

letter was probably \**wunju* (cf. O.E. *wyn*), which later became sounded \**unju*<sup>1</sup>; the letter *u* therefore took the place of *w*. The earliest certain example of this substitution occurs in the inscription of Kallerup, which has the form *suiþks* for *swiðings*. A probable example of the sound-change is supplied by the form *urti* in the inscription of Sölvesborg<sup>2</sup>. Wimmer dates the inscription of Sölvesborg at about 750—775 and that of Kallerup at about 800—825. I am under the impression that Wimmer's dating of the inscriptions is in all cases somewhat too late. In the present case however that is of little importance. The loss of the sound *w*- took place at all events after the syncope of final *-a*, and this latter change is not likely to have taken place before the beginning of the sixth century, and may be somewhat later. The word *Óðinn* therefore can not prove the existence of the cult before the sixth century at the earliest.

## 2. *The legends of Othin-heroes.*

The antiquity of some of these legends is shown by their appearance in *Beowulf*, a poem which deals almost exclusively with Scandinavian affairs. *Beowulf*'s acquaintance with Scandinavian history does not extend to events which happened later than the first half of the sixth century, and it may be assumed with a certain amount of probability that legends, which appear in the poem, were already current by this time either among the English or among some of the Northern peoples.

<sup>1</sup> The regular form in the later language would be \**yn*, but the word is lost.

<sup>2</sup> The right reading may however be *Ruti*.

i. The story of Sigmundr, son of Volsungr. It has long been recognised that the cult of Othin is an essential feature in the history of the Volsung family (cf. Müllenhoff, *Z. f. d. A.* xxiii. 116 ff.). This is true above all in the case of Sigmundr. Othin gives Sigmundr a sword with which he is always victorious until his last battle, when the sword breaks on Othin's javelin (cf. p. 16). In the *Eireksmál* Sigmundr is represented, together with Sinfiotli (his son by his son Signý), as welcoming Eirekr at the gates of Valhøll. Reference is made in *Beowulf* (875 ff.) to legends about Sigemund and Fitela (i.e. Sinfiotli), though it is stated only that the latter was the son of Sigemund's sister<sup>1</sup>, not of Sigemund himself. The evidence is however hardly conclusive for proving that Othin-heroes were known to the Danes at this time; for *Beowulf* is an English poem, and the legend, which seems not to have been Scandinavian originally, might have been known to the poet before it came to the Danes.

ii. *Hermóðr*. This hero is mentioned together with Sigmundr in *Hyndluljóð* 2:—"He (Othin) gave *Hermóðr* a helmet and coat of mail, and Sigmundr a sword<sup>2</sup>." *Hermóðr* therefore, like Sigmundr, appears to have been under Othin's special protection. In *Hákonarmál* *Hermóðr* together with Bragi welcomes Hákon at the gates of Valhøll, discharging therefore the duty which in *Eireksmál* is allotted to Sigmundr. Legends about this hero must once have existed, but now his name is only known from these two passages. It is unnecessary for the present purpose to discuss the question whether he is

<sup>1</sup> l. 881. eam his nefan.

<sup>2</sup> gaf hann Hermóði  
hiálm ok brynju  
en Sigmundi  
sverð at þiggja.

really identical with the god Hermóðr, who is mentioned in the account of Balder's death (Gylf. 49). The latter seems to be the Hermóðr, to whom reference is made in *Sggubrot af fornkonungum* 3 (F. A. S. I. 373). It is noticeable that in both the passages in which his name occurs, Hermóðr is associated, either directly or implicitly, not only with Othin but also with Sigmundr. Now in *Beowulf*, 898 ff., Sigemund is compared with a certain Heremod, who, like Hermóðr, appears to have been a great warrior. Since the names Hermóðr and Heremōd are identical, and both occur in conjunction with Sigmundr-Sigemund, it is very probable that they denote the same person. In that case there is evidence in *Beowulf* for the existence of another Othin-hero. This case also is not open to the same objection as that of Sigmundr, for it is quite clear from *Beowulf* 913, 1709 ff., that Heremod was regarded as a Danish king, though belonging to a past generation.

iii. Starkaðr. This hero was regarded by the Danes as the typical servant of Othin (cf. p. 71). His story has acquired mythological features, but there seems to be a certain amount of historical foundation for that part of his career, in which he is associated with the Danish kings Fróði (Frotho) and Ingialdr (Ingellus). Now the episode in which Starcatherus incites Ingellus to murder the sons of Suertingus (*Saxo* VI. pp. 303—315), cannot be separated from *Beowulf's* account of the old warrior (*eald æscwiga*), who goads Ingeld into revenge (2041 ff.). The warrior's name is not mentioned in *Beowulf*, but there can be little doubt that he is identical with Starcatherus. His position differs from that of Sigemund and Heremod in that he is represented as a contemporary of *Beowulf*, while the others are already heroes of the past. He belongs to the *Hcaðobeardnas*, a tribe which has not been



successfully identified; yet since Frotho and Ingellus appear in Saxo as Danish kings, it is probable that the Heaðobeardnas were nothing more than a division of the Danes, and that their war with the Scyldingas was dynastic rather than national. It is impossible to suppose that Starcatherus (Starkaðr) was regarded by Saxo and the Norse writers otherwise than as a Scandinavian hero. It is to be observed also that in Saxo Starcatherus is not represented as the introducer of a new cult, but, on the contrary, as an essentially conservative character. It is reasonable therefore to suppose that the cult of Othin was in existence before his time.

On the whole therefore the acquaintance of Beowulf with the Othin-heroes Sigmundr and Hermóðr, and with a person who seems at a later time to have developed into the Othin-hero Starkaðr, renders it probable that the cult of Othin was already known to the Danes in the first half of the sixth century.

### 3. *The institutions and customs associated with the cult of Othin.*

i. *Sacrificial hanging.* It has been shown that the custom of hanging is known to Beowulf both in the case of enemies captured in war (cf. p. 18), and apparently also in cases of natural or accidental death (cf. p. 38 f.). In the former case the practice is attributed to the Swedish king Ongentheo, whose death, judging from Beowulf, would seem to have taken place about the end of the fifth century. It has further been pointed out (p. 17 f.) that the practice of hanging, as a distinctly sacrificial act, is attributed to the Scandinavians by Procopius, who says that human victims are sacrificed in this and other ways

to "Ares." It has often been supposed that the god here meant is Týr; but there is little evidence in favour of such an assumption. Týr is an unimportant figure in the northern mythology, and there is no record of human sacrifices being offered to him. The sacrifice by hanging is never mentioned in connection with any other god than Othin, Thor's victims being put to death in an entirely different manner (cf. p. 19). That "Ares" might be used for Othin is shown, not only by the fact that Othin was regarded as the giver of victory, but also by Saxo's use of "Mars" in the same sense (cf. p. 18, n. 3). Procopius' information was perhaps derived from those Eruli who had been in "Thule." Together with the passage from Beowulf quoted above, his account renders it probable that the cult of Othin was practised in the North about the beginning of the sixth century.

ii. Weapons and tactics in warfare. There is a very strong resemblance between the method of warfare attributed to Othin's heroes in Ynglinga s. 6 and the method practised by the Eruli in the sixth century (cf. p. 39 f.). In its main features also this method of warfare seems to have resembled that practised by the ancient Germans of Tacitus' time. The absence of defensive armour is a distinctive feature in all these cases. Further the "wedge" formation, which was greatly practised by the ancient Germans, was believed by the Scandinavians to be an invention of Othin's (cf. p. 21). Among the ancient Germans the absence of defensive armour is in all probability to be attributed to the difficulty experienced in obtaining it. With the Eruli of the fifth and sixth centuries this can hardly have been the case; their reluctance to use armour must have been based, at least in part, on religious grounds (cf. p. 40). This association however between religion and the custom of fighting

unprotected would rather seem to show that the cult had been known at a time when defensive armour had not yet come into use. Now, if, on the same principle, we are justified in assuming that the equipment attributed to Othin's heroes in *Ynglinga saga* shows that, at the time when the cult was introduced, defensive armour was still unknown, then the introduction of the cult can hardly be dated later than the beginning of the fifth century. For the discoveries at Thorsbjærg and Nydam (cf. p. 62) show that both the helmet and coat of mail were known to the inhabitants of Slesvig and southern Jutland during the fourth century, and also that by the same time the sword and the long spear had, to a great extent, taken the place of the javelin. Weapons used in Slesvig during the fourth century could hardly fail to be known in Sweden within the space of another hundred years<sup>1</sup>.

Lastly it perhaps deserves notice that the "runes" are frequently mentioned in connection with Othin, not merely in the sense of "mysteries," but also as denoting the written characters. There seem to be traces of a similar association of ideas amongst the ancient English (cf. p. 29). Unfortunately however the age of the Runic inscriptions in the North is still a matter of dispute. On the whole it seems probable that the oldest inscriptions of Sweden and Norway are not later than the fifth century. This however gives no indication of the date at which writing was introduced. It is not likely that a single inscription in England dates from within a hundred and fifty years of the first invasion; there are only two which have any

<sup>1</sup> The argument is, of course, not conclusive. The description of Othin's equipment might also be due to a tradition imported from abroad simultaneously with the cult. The latter explanation would seem to necessitate the belief that the ritual use of the javelin was acquired together with the cult.

reasonable claim to be dated before A.D. 650. The case of the so-called "tree-runes" may be compared. There can be little doubt that they are pan-Germanic; yet there is no certain example of their use in the North until late in the Viking age. Hence even if none of the extant Runic inscriptions prove to be earlier than the beginning of the sixth century, it is likely enough that the alphabet was known two or three centuries earlier.

The results of this discussion may be briefly summarised as follows: There is good reason, from several different sides, for believing that the cult of Othin was known in the North at the beginning of the sixth century; the positive evidence for proving an acquaintance with the cult before this time is not strong; but on the other hand there is no evidence whatever to the contrary.

In Tacitus' account the Swedes (Suiones) present a striking contrast to all the other nations of Germany. After describing the construction of their ships he proceeds (Germ. 44):—"These people pay respect even to wealth. The power is therefore vested in one man. Here there are no reservations; his claim to obedience does not rest merely on sufferance. Nor are weapons to be seen in every man's hand, as is the case with the rest of the Germans. On the contrary they are kept stored away in the charge of a slave<sup>1</sup>." The state of society here depicted is clearly incompatible with the existence of such a cult as that of Othin, which could hardly flourish except under conditions of chronic warfare<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand it corresponds excellently with

<sup>1</sup> Est apud illos et opibus honos; eoque unus imperitat, nullis iam exceptionibus, non precario iure parendi. nec arma, ut apud ceteros Germanos, in promiscuo, sed clausa sub custode, et quidem seruo etc.

<sup>2</sup> This is obvious from the accounts of all the great Othin-heroes, e.g. Sigmundr, Starkaðr, Haraldr Hilditǫnn, Ragnar Loðbrók. Reference may be made also to the conduct of the Eruli, who according to Procopius

the peace and plenty and the semi-priestly government, which, according to *Ynglinga s. 12*, marked the days of Frö.

It is not quite clear whether Tacitus' information was recent. It might possibly be based on stories heard by the members of Drusus' and Germanicus' expeditions in the early part of the century. On the whole, however, it seems likely that his information was derived through quite a different channel. He passes on to the Suiones, not by way of the Elbe tribes, but by a much more eastern course. The tribes mentioned last before the Suiones are the Gotones, Rugii and Lemouii; after the Suiones he passes immediately to the Aestii. Hence it is not improbable that he derived his information from Nero's agent, who had been sent (apparently by way of Carnuntum) to examine the amber coasts. Tacitus' information will therefore apply to a period shortly after the middle of the first century. Therefore, if any reliance is to be placed on his account, the cult of Othin can not have been known to the Swedes before about A.D. 50.

It has been shown above (1) that the cult of Othin must, in all probability, have been known to the Swedes by about A.D. 500, and (2) that its introduction apparently did not take place before about A.D. 50. For the attainment of a more definite answer there appears to be but one argument available, and this too is one which is usually regarded with the utmost scepticism. Can the introduction of the cult have synchronised with the introduction of the practice of cremation? It has already been mentioned (p. 22) that in *Ynglinga s. 8*

(Gothic War, II. 14) compelled their king Rudolph to make war against the Langobardi, though they brought forward no excuse except the fact that they had been without war for three years.

the institution of cremation is attributed to Othin:—"He ordained that all dead men should be burnt and brought on to the pyre with their property," etc. I can not see that there is any great inherent improbability in such an assumption. For the practice of burning the dead seems to point towards a view of immortality which was altogether inconsistent with the popular Scandinavian belief. According to this belief the souls of the dead were supposed to live on in the howe in which they were buried. In several cases the ghost is represented as defending his treasure, when the howe is broken open. The howe seems to have been situated close to the family dwelling, and the ancestral spirits were believed to exercise a beneficent influence over the fortunes of the family. Offerings appear to have been paid to them, especially, it would seem, with the view of obtaining fertility for the land. It may be objected that the continuance of the soul's life in the howe would not be affected by the burning of the body. But the souls of those who were burnt according to the ordinances of Othin, were supposed to pass to Valhøll. The two conceptions are entirely different; for Valhøll was regarded as far away. In *Sögubrot af fornkonungum* 9 Hringr gives Haraldr a chariot and horse, in order that he may ride or drive to Valhøll (cf. p. 22 f.). So also in *Ynglinga* s. 10 Othin, when dying, "said that he was about to journey to Goðheimr and greet his friends there. The Swedes now thought that he had come into the ancient Ásgarðr and would there live for ever." The view expressed in this passage may of course have been influenced to some extent by Christian ideas. Yet, that Valhøll was regarded as far away, may be inferred from another passage in the same saga (c. 13):—"When all the Swedes knew that Frö

was dead, but plenty and peace continued, they believed that this would last as long as Frö was in Sweden ; so they would not burn him, but they called him the god of the world and sacrificed to him ever afterwards for plenty and peace<sup>1</sup>." In the preceding chapter it is stated that Frö was laid in a howe. The view of Frö's immortality here expressed is identical with the belief in the continued life of the spirits in the family howe. The reluctance of the Swedes to burn Frö is attributed to their belief that, if this took place, he would no longer be with them, but would pass to some other place. There can scarcely be any doubt, in view of what is stated of Othin and Níðr, that Valhøll is the place meant. But if this belief prevailed in the case of Frö, is there any adequate reason for doubting the existence of a similar belief in the case of the family manes? If not, the introduction of cremation can be explained only by supposing that a revolution had taken place in the Scandinavian view of immortality.

Icelandic writers were under the erroneous impression that the practice of burning the body was older than the practice of howe burial. Thus in the Preface to *Heimskringla* it is stated:—"The first age is called the age of burning ; all dead men had then to be burnt and 'bauta'-stones raised to their memory. . But after Frö had been 'howe-laid' at Upsala, many princes raised howes no less than bauta-stones in memory of their kinsmen. But after Danr the Proud, King of the Danes, had had a howe made for him, and given orders that after his death he should be brought there with his royal equipment and

<sup>1</sup> þá er allir Svíar vissu at Freyr var dauðr, en hélzt ár ok friðr, þá trúðu þeir at svá mundi vera, meðan Freyr væri á Sviþióð, ok vildu eigi brenna hann, ok kølluðu hann veraldar goð, blótuðu mest til árs ok friðar alla ævi síðan.

armour, and his horse with its harness, and much treasure besides, many members of his family did so afterwards; and the age of howe-burial began in Denmark. But the age of burning continued much later among the Swedes and Norwegians<sup>1</sup>." According to *Ynglinga saga* three of the first nine Swedish kings after Frö were cremated, namely Vanlandi, Dómarr and Agni, besides one, Vísburr, who was burnt alive. The first kings who are stated to have been 'howe-laid' are Alfr and Yngvi, grandsons of Agni; after this howe-burial is frequently mentioned. On the other hand, no king is burnt after Agni except Haki (c. 27), who did not belong to the native dynasty; in his case the cremation took place on a ship. The evidence of *Ynglinga saga* therefore agrees with the statement in the Preface. Yet the evidence of the monuments has made it clear that howe-burial, in one form or another, was practised from the very earliest times—before the use of any metal was known, whereas cremation first makes its appearance comparatively late in the age of bronze. The statements of the ancient writers however appear to contain a certain amount of truth. Burning, which towards the close of the bronze age, and for some time after the first appearance of iron, appears to have been practically universal, again seems to be partially displaced by howe-burial in the course of the early iron age. The ancient writers were mistaken only in supposing that the practice was new. In reality it was a return to

<sup>1</sup> hin fyrsta öld er kölluð brunaöld, þá skyldi brenna alla dauða menn ok reisa eptir bautasteina. en síðan er Freyr hafði heygðr verit at Uppsölum, þá gerðu margir hofðingiar eigi síðr hauga en bautasteina til minningar eptir frændr sína. en síðan er Danr hinn mikilláti Dana-konungr lét sér hang gera, ok bauð sik þangat bera dauðan með konungs sknúði ok herbúnaði, ok hest hans með sǫðulreiði ok mikit fé annat, en hans ættmenn gerðu margir svá síðan, ok hófst þar haugsöld þar í Danmörk. en lengi síðan hélzt brunaöld með Svíum ok Norðmönnum.



the old native custom. It is possible that the old custom was resumed among the Swedish royal family earlier than elsewhere on account of their traditional relationship to Frö.

I would not, of course, be prepared to go so far as to say that howe-burial was always associated with the cult of Frö and the manes. In the *Sögubrot* of *fornkonungun* *Haraldr Hilditönn* is howe-laid, though at the same time it is explicitly stated that he is expected to go to *Valhöll*<sup>1</sup>. In later times the once intimate association between cremation and the cult of Othin may have been in part forgotten. This may have been due to the combination into one system of the cults of Othin and of Frö. That they were originally quite distinct, and that the latter was the earlier of the two, there can hardly be any serious doubt. It is likely that a reminiscence of the struggle between the two cults is preserved in the story of the war between the *Aesir* and the *Vanir* (cf. *Golther, Mythologie*, p. 222 f.).

The data available for ascertaining the period at which cremation began to be practised in the North, are very scanty. It is agreed that cremation was known before the introduction of iron. According to *Montelius* (*Civilisation of Sweden*, p. 46; cf. *Nordisk Tidskrift*, 1884, p. 25) the age of bronze in the North lasted from about B.C. 1500 to about B.C. 500, iron first coming into use about the latter date. Since cremation belongs roughly to the latter half of this period, its introduction, according to *Montelius'* calculation, will have taken place about B.C. 1000. If this calculation is correct, the introduction of the practice of cremation can not have been due to the cult of Othin; for the latter seems not to have been known to the

<sup>1</sup> According to *Saxo's* account he was cremated (cf. p. 22).

Swedes at the beginning of the present era. But there seems to be considerable doubt as to whether Montelius' conclusions are correct. Worsaae's calculations (*Prehistory of the North*, p. 75) differ from those of Montelius by at least 500 years. He holds (*Prehistory*, p. 113) that there is scarcely sufficient evidence for the existence of an iron-culture in full force even in Denmark during the first century of the present era. In reality the first antiquities, to which an approximate date can be assigned with any degree of probability, are the articles found in the bogs of Thorsbjærg and Nydam. These deposits are attributed by Montelius (*Nordisk Tidskrift*, 1884, p. 25) to the third century, by Wimmer (*Runenschrift*?, p. 302 f.) to the beginning of the fifth century. We shall probably not go very far wrong in concluding that they belong to about the fourth century. These deposits prove the existence at this time of a fully developed iron culture in South Jutland. At Thorsbjærg many sword-hilts and spear-shafts were found, though the iron was all decomposed. The Nydam deposit contained over a hundred swords and from five to six hundred spear-heads. The shafts of the spears varied from eight to ten feet in length (cf. Engelhardt, *Denmark in the Early Iron Age*, pp. 52 f., 57). Iron had therefore completely displaced bronze as a material for weapons. But this can not prove that iron was known more than two hundred years earlier. For the transition from the exclusive use of bronze to a fully developed iron equipment two centuries is an ample allowance. In South Jutland therefore the age of bronze may have lasted till the beginning of the second century. There is nothing improbable in such an assumption. Among the Germans with whom Tacitus was acquainted, presumably those living between the Rhine and the Elbe, in the latter part of the first century, the iron-culture was by no means so

far developed as among the South Jutlanders in the fourth century. He says distinctly (Germ. 6) that iron was not plentiful; consequently few of them possessed swords or long spears; the usual weapon was a javelin with a short and thin iron head. Beyond the Eider the equipment may well have been still more primitive. It is not unlikely that the "short swords" (*breues gladii*) used by the eastern tribes (*Gotones, Rugii, Lemouii*; Germ. 43) were made of bronze. But if bronze was still used by the inhabitants of the southern and south-western coasts of the Baltic up to the end of the first or the beginning of the second century, it is likely enough that another century may have elapsed before iron came into anything like general use in Sweden. I can not see that there is any improbability in supposing that the iron age proper did not begin in Sweden before the third century. It has been mentioned above that the western Germans of Tacitus' time were still in what may be called a rudimentary iron age. But among the Slavs in the sixth century the iron-culture appears to have been no further developed than among Tacitus' Germans. Like the latter they carried no arms except a shield and javelin (*Procopius, Gothic War, III. 14*). This illustrates the slowness with which the knowledge of the metals travelled. The original home of the Slavs lay no further from the boundaries of Roman civilisation than did that of the Swedes, though in the case of the Slavs there was of course a racial barrier to be overcome. Taking all considerations together, it seems to me probable that the degree of progress in the knowledge of the metals, which we find among the western Germans in the first century, and among the Slavs in the sixth century, is scarcely likely to have been reached by the Swedes before the third or fourth century. Isolated iron weapons may of course have penetrated occasionally

to the North before this time<sup>1</sup>. Yet this is not enough to constitute even a rudimentary iron age in the true sense.

Between the adoption of the practice of cremation and the beginning of the rudimentary iron-culture some considerable time must have elapsed; but the calculation of centuries in such a case can be nothing more than mere guess-work. If the rudimentary iron-culture began in the third century, it is by no means impossible that the adoption of cremation took place in the first century. Hence if cremation is to be associated in any way with the cult of Othin, it is during the latter part of the first century that we must suppose the cult to have been introduced into Sweden. This hypothesis receives some slight support from a statement in Tacitus (*Germ.* 40). He says that seven northern tribes worshipped the goddess Nerthus, i.e. Mother Earth, "on an island in the ocean." There can be no serious doubt that this goddess Nerthus is closely related to the Scandinavian god Njǫrðr. A rite very similar to that described by Tacitus was practised by the Swedes in connection with the worship of Frö (Freyr) the son of Njǫrðr. The festival of Nerthus was accompanied by a holy peace; wars were not undertaken, and weapons were put away; "peace and quiet are then only known and loved" until the goddess returns to her temple. From this description it seems likely enough that the cult of Woden-Othin prevailed among these tribes, but that it was combined to some extent with the older cult of Nerthus-Njǫrðr. Since Njǫrðr and Frö were essentially gods of peace, it is probable that the holy peace which was kept at certain seasons (perhaps the new year), was a

<sup>1</sup> It is likely that for a long time afterwards swords and other weapons were largely of foreign manufacture. Several of the swords found in the bogs of South Jutland bear Roman marks.

survival from this earlier cult. Now it has been rashly assumed by many writers that the island on which the temple stood was necessarily situated in the North Sea. But there is absolutely no evidence for this assumption; in cc. 43, 44 "*oceanus*" is clearly used of parts of the Baltic. There is no island in the North Sea large enough to fulfil the conditions required in Germ. 40. Hence Much (P. B. B. xvii. 196 ff.) and Sarazzin (Anglia, xix. 384) have conjectured with great probability that the island mentioned by Tacitus is in reality the island of Seeland. If this is really the case, and if in Tacitus' time the cult of Woden-Othin had already made its way so far north, there is nothing strange in supposing that it may have become known to the Swedes in the course of the next generation.

The conclusions attained in the course of this discussion may be briefly summarised as follows:—(1) The cult of Othin was in all probability known in the North at the beginning of the sixth century; there is no reason for supposing that it was then new. (2) The cult does not seem to have been practised by the Swedes in the first half-century of the present era. (3) If the adoption of cremation was due to the cult of Othin, the cult can hardly have been introduced into Sweden later than the end of the first century.

## NOTE I.

### THE NAME OF THE GOD.

The original meaning of the words \**Wōðanaz* (O. Sax. *Wōdan*, O.H.G. *wuotan*) and \**Wōðenaz* (O.E. *Wōden*, O.N. *Óðinn*) is much disputed. Some take the word to be related to Sk. *vāta*- 'wind,' and consequently regard Woden as having been originally a god of wind and storm. This etymology is improbable as Golther (*Mythologie*, p. 293, footnote) has shown; *vīta*- represents in all probability an Idg. \**uēto*- and is closely related to Lat. *uentus*. Golther (*Mythologie*, p. 292 ff.) holds that Woden is a deified development of Wode, the leader of the ghostly army (*das wütende Heer*) which is supposed to dash through the air on stormy nights. Kluge (*Wb.*\* p. 412 b; cf. Bradke, *Dyâus Asura*, p. x, footnote) while admitting a relationship between Woden and *das wütende Heer*, connects the former with Lat. *uātes*, O. Ir. *fāith*, and hence concludes that the god had originally a bardic character. Golther's hypothesis is especially favoured by Adam of Bremen's expression '*Wodun, id est furor*' (iv. 26; cf. O.E. *wodendream* = *furor animi*, Gloss.), and by the fact that in Sweden '*das wütende Heer*' is known as '*Odens jagt*.' Yet one must surely reckon with the possibility that this superstition may have received its name from later association with the Woden-mythology. Golther also overstates the case against the connection of *Wōden* with Lat. *uātes* etc., when he protests that this assumes for the cult in its initial stages, a character which it can have attained only in its

latest and highest development. When the cult first makes its appearance, namely in the first century, Woden is rendered by *Mercurius*, an identification which would be inexplicable, unless the higher side of the god's character was already to some extent developed. Golther's objection is based on the assumption that the cult was native among the Germans. If on the other hand the cult was introduced from abroad, the god may very well have been associated from the beginning with all those attributes by which he was characterised in later times.

If the word *wōden* is related to *uātes*, it does not necessarily follow that the god had originally a bardic character. Among the Gauls the 'uates' were distinct from the 'bardi,' cf. Strabo, iv. 4, 4 :—"The bards are minstrels and poets, but the uates are offerers of sacrifices and interpreters of nature'." Diodorus (v. 31) renders *uates* by *μάντις*. It can scarcely be denied that the 'uates,' who seems to have combined the offices of soothsayer and sacrificial priest, bears a certain resemblance to Othin (Woden); for the latter is distinguished above all else by his skill in sorcery. It is perhaps worth mention that Othin appears as *Uggerus* (i.e. Yggr) *uates* in Saxo, v. p. 238.

On the whole therefore Kluge's explanation seems to me the most probable. The word *\*wōðanaz*—*\*wōðenaz* seems to be participial in form and may originally have denoted 'inspired.' It is likely enough that the word is related both to O.E. *wōd* (= *rabidus uel insanus*, Gloss.) and to O.E. *wōþ* (= *facundia*, Gloss.)<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> βάρδοι μὲν ὑμνηταὶ καὶ ποιηταί, οὐάται δὲ ἱεροποιοὶ καὶ φυσιολόγοι.

<sup>2</sup> cf. Kluge, l.c. ; Kaufmann, *Mythologie*, p. 42 f.

## NOTE II.

### THE STORY OF STARKAÐR.

The following story is told in Gautreks s. 7 (F. A. S. III. 32f.), immediately after the account of the lot-casting, through which king Vikar lost his life (cf. p. 3). Shortly before midnight Starkaðr was awakened by his foster-father Hrosshársgrani, and told to follow him. They took a small boat and rowed out to an island. Then they went up into the forest and came to a clearing, in which an assembly of considerable size was being held. Eleven men were seated on chairs, and there was another chair vacant. They came into the assembly and Hrosshársgrani sat down on the vacant chair. He was greeted by all as Othin. He said that they were assembled in order to decide Starkaðr's fate. Then Thor began as follows:—"Alfhildr, the mother of Starkaðr's father, chose a cunning giant, in preference to Ásaþórr, to be the father of her son. I decree that Starkaðr shall have neither son nor daughter. His line shall thus come to an end." Othin answered:—"I decree that he shall live for three generations." Thor said:—"He shall work a dastardly deed in each generation." Othin: "I decree that he shall have the best of weapons and clothes." Thor: "I decree that he shall have neither land nor fief." Othin: "I grant him that he shall have moveable property in abundance." Thor: "I determine that he shall never think he has enough." Othin: "I give him victory and prowess in every battle." Thor: "I determine that he shall receive a severe wound in every



battle." Othin: "I grant him the gift of poetry, so that he shall be able to compose as fast as he can speak." Thor: "He shall not be able to remember what he composes." Othin: "I decree that he shall receive the greatest favour from the noblest and best of men." Thor: "He shall be detested by all the commons." They passed all these decrees about Starkaðr's fate, and the assembly then broke up. Hrosshársgrani then asks Starkaðr to reward him for the favourable decrees which he had made for him, and when Starkaðr signifies assent he demands his assistance in procuring Vikar's death: "thou shalt send king Vikar to me" (cf. p. 3 f.).

This story is instructive in two respects. It shows, firstly, that Othin was thought to preside over certain departments of human life, while others were controlled by Thor. Othin grants (1) prolongation of life. According to Saxo<sup>1</sup> vi. p. 276 Othinus granted to Starcatherus thrice the ordinary span of life, in return for the sacrifice of Vicarus. With this may be compared the sacrifice of Aun (Ynglinga s. 29), who obtains prolongation of life by sacrificing one of his sons to Othin every tenth year. Othin grants (2) choice weapons and clothes and abundance of moveable wealth. With this may be compared Hyndluljóð 2:—"He (Othin) makes grants and presents of gold to his following; he gave Hermóðr a helmet and coat of mail, and presented Sigmundr with a sword" (cf. p. 51)<sup>2</sup>. Othin is (3) the giver of victory. This requires no illustration (cf. p. 5 f.). He is (4) the giver of poetry (*skáldskapr*); cf. Saxo vi. p. 276:—"He endowed Starcatherus not only with valour but also with skill in the composition of

<sup>1</sup> The story related above does not occur in Saxo.

<sup>2</sup> hann geldr ok gefr  
gull verðungu:  
gaf hann Hermóði  
hiálm ok bryniu,  
ok Sigmundi  
sverð at þiggia.

songs<sup>1</sup>." So according to Ynglinga s. 6: "He (Othin) made all his speeches in verse in the same way in which we now recite what is called *skáldskapr*. He and his temple-priests are called song-smiths (*lióðasmíðir*) because they originated this art in the North." Hyndluljóð 3 may also be compared: "He gives victory to some and money to others; eloquence and wisdom he grants to many men. He gives fair breezes to captains and diction to poets; valour he grants to many a champion<sup>2</sup>." Lastly Othin promises Starkaðr the favour of the nobility, while Thor denies him the good will of the commons. This agrees with the fact that the cult of Othin seems to have been practised chiefly, if not exclusively, at the courts of kings and nobles, while Thor remained the god of the commons. Hárbarðsljóð 24 may be compared:—"Othin possesses the nobles who fall in battle, but Thor has the race of serfs<sup>3</sup>." On the other hand not only the good will of the commons, but also the granting of land and of children seem to be out of Othin's power. In the latter case Frö was perhaps more frequently invoked than Thor<sup>4</sup>; but probably the granting of land was usually attributed to Thor. He is called *landáss* "god of the land," and seems to have been the patron of the assembly. But these distinctions between the powers of the various gods may in part hold good only for the later days of heathendom, and were even then not always strictly observed. The story is important chiefly for its

<sup>1</sup> *Starcatherum*.....non solum animi fortitudine, sed etiam condendorum carminum pericia illustravit.

<sup>2</sup> gefr hann sigr sumum,  
 en sumum aura,  
 mælsku mǫrgum  
 ok mannvit frum  
 byri gefr hann brǫgnum  
 en brag skaldum,  
 gefr hann mannsemi  
 mǫrgum rekki.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. p. 26 f. and the passage from Saxo there quoted.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Adam of Bremen iv. 26.

account of the blessings which the worshipper of Othin was supposed to enjoy.

Secondly, the story shows that the relations between Thor and Starkaðr were essentially different from those between Othin and Starkaðr. Othin's decrees are all blessings; Thor's are the reverse. Thor is only once mentioned by Saxo in the passages which deal with Starcatherus, namely vi. p. 274, where it is stated that Starcatherus was supposed to have been of giant origin and had originally many hands, all of which except two were stripped off by Thor. But since Thor is always represented as hostile to giants, it may reasonably be inferred that he was hostile also to Starcatherus. Again it is perhaps worth mention that according to Saxo, vi. p. 278 Starcatherus, after staying seven years in Sweden with the sons of Frö, was so disgusted with the rites practised at the Upsala sacrifices, that he returned to Denmark. This passage seems to show that Starkaðr was hostile to the worship of Frö. On the other hand he is very closely associated with the cult of Othin; for according to Gautreks saga Othin was his foster-father. The story of his compact with Othin and the consequent sacrifice of Vikar is known both to Gautreks saga and to Saxo.

Starkaðr has usually been regarded as the typical Northern warrior of old time. This is true; but in reality he is far more. He is also the chief of the legendary Northern poets. If I am not mistaken, he was regarded in early times as the typical worshipper of Othin.

### NOTE III.

#### THE INTERPRETATION OF HÁVAMÁL 138 f.

It has been customary in recent years to trace various features in the Othin-mythology to Christian sources. Some of the theories put forward on this subject appear at first sight more or less plausible. Practically however the whole question rests on the interpretation of Hávamál 138 f. If the explanation of this passage adopted by Munch and Bugge be accepted, many of the other theories may deserve consideration; if on the other hand this explanation be rejected, few will probably attach much importance to the rest. The passage runs as follows:—138 “I know that I hung full nine nights on the gallows tree (or “windy tree”) wounded by the javelin and given to Othin, myself to myself; on that tree, of which no one knows from whose roots it proceeds.” 139. “They cheered me (or “assuaged my hunger and thirst”) neither with bread nor drink; I looked down and took up runes, took them up crying; from thence I fell again’.”

¹ veit ek at ek hekk  
vindga meiði á,  
nætr allar níu,  
geiri undaðr  
ok gefinn Óðni,  
siálfr siálfum mér;  
á þeim meiði  
er mangi veit  
hvers hann af rótum renn.  
  
við hleifi mik seldu  
né við hornigi,

According to Bugge's theory the Norse vikings became acquainted with Christian doctrines in their expeditious among the Western Islands during the ninth century. These doctrines, though at first totally foreign to the ideas of the Northern religion, yet became in course of time assimilated and transferred to Othin. I am not prepared altogether to deny the possibility of such a transference of religious ideas. Whether such particulars as the story of Leucius and Carinus (Bugge, *Studier*, p. 334 ff.) could be thus orally acquired seems to me more doubtful. Yet it is not absolutely impossible that some Northern bard should have had access to written texts. These details however are scarcely material to the main point.

According to Golther (*Mythologie*, p. 350), who in the main follows Bugge, there are two decisive points which establish the Christian origin of the story recounted in *Háv.* 138 f. These are (1) that the god sacrificed himself; (2) that the gallows-tree, which was used for this purpose, became thereby emblematic of the world. These two points require separate treatment. It will be convenient to begin with the latter.

The identity of the world-tree with the tree on which Othin hung is inferred from the following facts: 1. The world-tree is called *Yggdrasill* (or *Ask* *Yggdrasils*), which is supposed to mean "Othin's horse"; 2. There is an unmistakeable correspondence between the closing words of *Háv.* 138:

á þeim meiði,  
er mangi veit,  
hvers hann af rótum renn.

nýsta ek niðr,  
nam ek upp rúnar,  
oepandi nam,  
fell ek apr þaðan.

On the interpretation of *vindga meiði* (138, 2) and *seldu* (139, 1) see Bugge, *Studier*, pp. 292 f., 345 n. 3; Magnússon, *Odin's Horse*, pp. 18 footnote and 27 ff.

"on that tree of which no one knows, from whose roots it proceeds," and *Fiqlsvinnsmál* 19, 20:

hvat þat barr heitir,  
er breiðask um  
lond öll limar?

Míma-meioðr hann heitir,  
enn þat mangi veit,  
af hverium rótum renn.

"What is that tree<sup>1</sup> called, whose branches spread over all lands?" 20. "It is called 'Míma'—tree, but no one knows from what roots it proceeds."

The hypothesis that *Yggdrasill* means 'Othin's horse,' in the sense of 'the horse (i.e. gallows) ridden by Othin,' does not seem to me to be satisfactorily established. In the first place the use of a compound instead of a dependent genitive in such a case is at least curious. *Yggr* is indeed a frequent name of Othin, but originally it would seem to have been merely an epithet. Though the word never occurs except as a name of Othin, is it not possible that in the compound its original sense may have been preserved—perhaps 'horse of terror' or something of the kind? Secondly, even if it be granted that *Yggdrasill* must mean 'Othin's horse' in the sense of 'gallows,' it does not necessarily follow that it denotes the gallows on which Othin himself hung. It might equally well denote the gallows on which Othin's victims were hanged.

Again, though there can scarcely be any doubt that some relationship exists between *Háv.* 138, 7—9 and *Fiqlsv.* 20, the nature of this relationship is not so clear. It is unlikely that the somewhat awkward *hvers hann af rótum renn* of *Hávamál* should be taken from the simpler *af hverium rótum renn* of *Fiqlsvinnsmál*. It is possible, however, that *Háv.* 138

<sup>1</sup> *barr* in reality denotes 'spine of a fir' etc. If the text is right, the poet can not have known the meaning of the word.

is not the original passage in which these words occurred. The strophe is too long by three lines for the líóðaháttir metre, and it is hardly unreasonable to suggest that these three lines may be a later addition from some other (lost) poem. The motive for the interpolation would be the desire to explain *vindga meiði* in l. 2<sup>1</sup>.

It is at least remarkable that, in all the passages which deal with the world-tree, there is not a single reference to its having served as Othin's gallows. Yet, according to Golther (pp. 350, 529 f.), it was precisely through this that the idea of a world-tree arose. Bugge also, while allowing that the people of the North may in very early times have conceived of a great, marvellous and holy tree, which did not belong to this earth, yet goes on to state (p. 527) that the subsequent development of this idea was due to Christian influences, and that the holy tree only obtained its full significance as 'world-tree' from its association with the Cross.

By far the most important parallel to the world-tree seems to me to be furnished by the description of the Upsala tree in Schol. 134 to Adam of Bremen: *prope templum est arbor maxima late ramos extendens, aestate et hyeme semper uirens: cuius illa generis sit nemo scit*. There is not an expression in this account which does not apply in some measure also to the world-tree. With *late ramos extendens* may be compared Fjolsv. 19: *es breiðask um lund all limar*; with *aestate et hyeme semper uirens* may be compared Vql. R. 18: *stendr æ yfir groenn Urðar brunni*, 'it (i.e. the ash) stands ever green over the well of Urðr (Fate).' Again, though Bugge expresses some doubt on the point, there is at least a striking similarity between the expression *cuius illa generis sit nemo scit* and Fjolsv. 20: *en þat mangi veit af hverium rötum renn*. Possibly the scholiast here may have misunderstood his information. Again, the first words of

<sup>1</sup> Magnússon (Odin's Horse, p. 22) retains ll. 7—9 and regards ll. 4—6 as interpolated (*geiri undaðr | ok gefinn Óðni, | sialfr sialfum mér*). But I do not see what could have given rise to such a curious interpolation.

the scholion : *prope templum est arbor maxima* etc. may be compared with *Grimnismál* 25 :

Heiðrún heitir geit,  
er stendr hóllo á Heriaföðrs  
ok bítr af Læraðs limom etc.

"There is a goat called Heiðrun which stands on Heriaföðr's (Othin's) hall and bites from the branches of Læraðr"—and 26 :

Eikþyrnir heitir higrtr,  
er stendr á hóllo Heriaföðrs,  
ok bítr af Læraðs limom etc.

"There is a hart called Eikþyrnir" etc. It is clear from these passages that the tree Læraðr stood close to the hall (Valhöll). According to the usual view, which is accepted by Bugge (p. 483 ; cf. also Golther, p. 529), Læraðr is either identical with Yggdrasill, or denotes the upper branches of the same. The description of the tree (or grove) Glasir in *Skaldskaparmál* 36 may also be compared :

Glasir stendr  
með gullnu laufi  
firir Sigtýs solum.

"Glasir stands with golden foliage in front of Sigtýr's (Othin's) halls." It is uncertain whether Glasir is identical with Yggdrasill or not. Again, with the expression *arbor maxima* may be compared *Völ. R.* 18 : *hár baðmr heilagr*. Lastly, in the same scholion, immediately after the description of the tree, occurs the following sentence : *ibi etiam est fons ubi sacrificia paganorum solent exerceri et homo vivus immergi*, etc. Though the relative positions of the tree and the spring are not indicated, it might reasonably be inferred from the passage that they were not far apart. Here, therefore, again may be compared the words of *Völ. R.* 18 : (Yggdrasill) *stendr æ yfir groenn Urðar brunni*.

Bugge (p. 502) seems to me to have greatly underrated



the importance of this scholion in its bearing upon the world-tree. He says there is no definite reference to the idea of a world-tree in the scholion, though (following Nyerup) he admits that the Upsala tree might possibly be a copy of the world-tree. On the other hand Mannhardt (Baumkultus, p. 57, foot-note) adduces a parallel from the account of Bishop Otto's journey to Stettin, A.D. 1124 (M. G. XII. 794): *erat praeterea ibi quercus ingens et frondosa, et fons subter eam amoenissimus, quam plebs simplex numinis alicuius inhabitacione sacram existimans magna ueneratione colebat*. When the bishop wished to destroy the oak, the inhabitants succeeded in dissuading him saying: *saluare illam potius quam saluari ab illa se uelle*. This passage shows that similar tree-sanctuaries were known on the continent<sup>1</sup>. It is impossible therefore to withstand Mannhardt's conclusion that 'Nyerup's Hypothese ist umzukehren.' This conclusion is further supported by the fact that the property assigned to the world-tree (Mimameiðr) in Fiqlsv. 22:

út af hans aldni  
skal á eld bera  
fyr killisiúkar konur.

"Some of its fruit is to be taken out and burnt for the sake of women who are in travail<sup>2</sup>" is identical with that popularly assigned to the 'Vårdträd' (cf. Mannhardt, p. 56). So also the position occupied by the Vårdträd in close proximity to the family house corresponds not only to that of the Upsala tree beside the temple, but also to that of

<sup>1</sup> They seem to have been especially important among the Lithuanians and Prussians, cf. Aeneas Sylvius, *Hist. de Europa*, xxvi.; S. Grunau, *Preussische Chronik*, Tract. 2, Cap. v. § 2; Tract. 3, Cap. i. § 2. It is noteworthy that the sacred oak of the Prussians, like the tree at Upsala, was *stets grün, winter und sommer*.

<sup>2</sup> Killisiúkar is an emendation suggested by Bugge. The MSS. have kelisiúkar ('hysterical,' according to Vigfusson). It is perhaps worth notice that among the ancient Prussians, according to Lucas David i. 137 f. (quoted by Voigt, *Geschichte Preussens* i. 583), the embers of the sacred fire of oak-wood were credited with medicinal properties.

Læraðr (and Glasir) beside Valhøll. Even Bugge (p. 499) admits that these holy ashes have influenced the doctrine of Yggdrasill. But I fail to see what elements in the conception of Yggdrasill could not have been developed out of the Vårdträd. Just as Valhøll, the warrior-paradise, is a copy of an earthly court, so Yggdrasill may be copied from the Vårdträd which stood beside the court. Yggdrasill is by no means consistently represented as including all things; besides the passage quoted above (p. 76) from Skáldskap-armál, mention may also be made of Grímn. 29, which represents the gods as coming to exercise justice under the ash Yggdrasill—a picture which may very well be drawn from real life. There are indeed only two poetic passages in which the ash Yggdrasill is definitely represented as a 'world-tree,' namely Fjölsv. 19 (cf. p. 74) and Grímn. 31. In the latter case it is stated that Hel, the Hrímbursar and the human race dwell under the three roots of the tree. In all other passages Yggdrasill may be interpreted as a heavenly Vårdträd. It is true that much is obscure in the representation of Yggdrasill, e.g. the use of the words *miptviðr* in Völ. R. 2 and *miptuðr* in Fjölsv. 20 (and Völ. R. 46?). Yet I can see no great difficulty involved in the transition from the conception of Yggdrasill as a tree whose life is bound up with the fate of the world to its conception as an all-comprehending world-tree. The association of Yggdrasill with the fate of the world comes naturally enough from its character as the Vårdträd of the gods. The different stages in the growth of the conception may briefly be indicated as follows: (1) Each community has a (material) Vårdträd, the life of which is bound up with the fate of the community; the tree at Upsala would seem to have been the Vårdträd of the Swedish nation (though originally it was no doubt the Vårdträd of the local community). (2) When Valhøll became depicted after the likeness of a human community, it had necessarily to be provided with a Vårdträd of its own. (3) When the conceptions of Valhøll and Ásgarðr became confused and a com-

plex theological system resulted; and when at the same time speculation began to pass beyond the ideas of family and tribe, and to take the whole human race into account, there arose the idea of 'the world,' a community embracing all beings, human, divine and demonic. This community was then provided with its Vårdräd, Yggdrasill, the life of which was bound up with the fate of the world.

The properties of the heavenly immaterial Yggdrasill seem to have been transferred thereto from its earthly material prototype. This applies not merely to its size, its position and its medicinal properties, but also to the uncertainty felt as to its origin, at least if the words *cuius illa generis sit nemo scit* have anything to do with *mangi veit af hverium rótum renn*. These words need not denote the immaterial character of the tree, but rather may mean simply that the seed from which it sprang was unknown. Therefore, though in Fjölsvinnsmál the expression *af hverium rótum renn* is applied to the heavenly Yggdrasill, this need not be the case with the parallel *hvers hann af rótum renn* in Hávamál. These words may be nothing more than a poetical circumlocution for Vårdräd. So also with regard to the name *Yggdrasill*, it has been shown (p. 74) that, even if this means 'Othin's horse,' it does not necessarily imply that it was the horse (i.e. gallows) which Othin himself rode; it might also denote the gallows on which Othin's victims were made to ride. There is indeed no explicit statement to the effect that Othin's victims were hanged on the Vårdräd, but there is nothing improbable in the idea. Adam of Bremen (iv. 27) states in his account of the Upsala sacrifice: *corpora (i.e. of the victims) autem suspenduntur in lucum qui proximus est templo. is enim lucus tam sacer est gentilibus ut singulae arbores eius ex morte uel tabo immolatorum diuinæ credantur*. What relation the 'tree' in Schol. 134 bears to the 'grove' in the text is not clear, but there is nothing improbable in supposing that it formed part thereof. Hence I can not see that there is any valid reason for disbelieving that the name

*Yggdrasill* may have been applied to the earthly Vårdräd, and transferred together with the conception of the tree to its heavenly copy. It is perhaps worth calling to mind that the name *Sleipnir* is used for a gallows in Ynglingatál (Yngl. s. 28).

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It is assumed both by Bugge (p. 297 ff.) and Golther (p. 350) that the sacrifice was a self-sacrifice on the part of Othin. Yet this is not stated in the text. The words *gefinn Óðni sialfr sialfum mér* can, so far as I can see, mean nothing more than 'given to Othin myself to myself,' i.e. Othin is both the person sacrificed and the person to whom the sacrifice is offered. There is no indication that Othin was also the sacrificer or that the sacrifice was voluntary on the part of the victim. The words of the Shetland song quoted by Bugge (p. 309), whatever may be its value, practically exclude such an interpretation; and they derive a certain amount of support from the opening lines of Háv. 139. The statement of Bugge and Golther, so far as it has any foundation at all, must be an inference from Ynglinga s. 10, where the dying Othin is represented as having himself marked with the point of a javelin (*lét hann marka sik geirsoddi*; cf. p. 13 f.). It is of course by no means certain that the events related in the two passages (Háv. 138 and Yngl. 10) are the same. If their identity be not admitted, Bugge's (and Golther's) assumption must be rejected as baseless. The identification is however ingenious, and on the whole I am rather inclined to think it may be right. The chief difficulty is that there is no reference to hanging in Ynglinga s. 10. But in the following chapter Niðrör also is represented as having himself marked with a javelin before his death (cf. p. 14). Niðrör is identical with Saxo's Hadingus who commits suicide by hanging himself (i. p. 60; see above, pp. 17, 35).

The acceptance of this identification does not of course involve the adoption of Bugge's theory. A far more probable

explanation of the myth is that it arose out of the desire to explain the ritual of sacrifice. Othin is above all a god of the dead, and his abode is the 'hall of the slain'; but how far the ancients in heathen times conceived of his having lived upon the earth, is not clear. So soon as this belief had arisen, and with it the idea that he passed to Valhøll by death, the conditions for the conception of the gallows-myth were at hand. Possibly also a misunderstanding of the term 'Othin's horse' (*Yggdrasill*, *Sleipnir*), as a name of the gallows-tree, may have contributed to this end. The objection urged by Golther (p. 350; cf. also Bugge, p. 304) against the view here put forward, namely that Othin would not be represented as choosing the form of death which was suffered by prisoners of war, is unfounded. This method of death was sacrificial, and though in later times the victims were no doubt usually prisoners, slaves or criminals, this appears not to have been the case in the earlier stages of the religion (cf. p. 27 f.). It is sufficient here to refer to the case of Hadingus—Niqrðr.

The bearing of the story related in Gautreks s. 7 (p. 3 f.) on Háv. 138 is obvious. The nature of the connection between the two passages ought to be equally clear, namely that we have in both cases a picture of the ordinary ritual of sacrifice to Othin. I can not see the slightest ground for supposing with Bugge (p. 315) that the story in Gautreks saga has been influenced by the myth of Othin's hanging. That it should be based on the passage in Hávamál is incredible.

Lastly some reference must be made to the interpretation of Háv. 141. According to Bugge and Golther the idea of Othin's increased vitality in this verse is consequent on his death in str. 139. Golther (p. 349) goes so far as to regard str. 140 as an interpolation, and Bugge (p. 353, n. 3) seems inclined to think it has got out of its right place. But I can see no obvious reason why str. 140 should have been inserted here, if this was not its original place. Again, I can not see

why str. 141 should have any reference to str. 139. The natural interpretation is to take str. 138, 139 together as an episode complete in itself, and str. 140, 141 as another episode, Othin's increased vitality being represented as due to his acquisition of Óðrerir. The key-words to the whole passage seem to me to be the almost synonymous *rún* and *lióð*. These serve to connect the two episodes, and at the same time to link them on both to what goes before (str. 137 and the preceding strophes) and to what follows. There seems to me to be no need for any change in the order of the strophes.



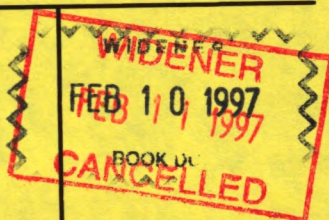
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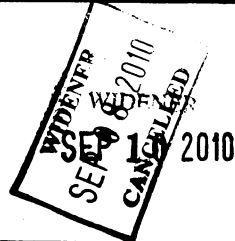
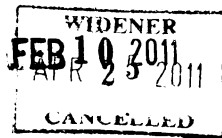
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